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MENSHIKOFF
OR
THE PEASANT PRINCE.

BY
ALFRED D'AVELINE



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MENSHIKOFF;

—OR,—

THE PEASANT PRINCE.

CHAPTER I.

THE PIE-VENDER.

“BUY, buy; hot pies, hot pies; buy my Paris pies, while they are hot.”

It was thus a boy about sixteen years of age was crying his pies and soliciting custom as he traversed the streets of Moscow, capital of the Russian Empire, where his sonorous voice had long been familiar. An enormous flat basket, covered with a spotless white napkin, and supported by two leathern straps which passed across his shoulders, hung upon his chest. As he walked along, he glanced around to see if any of his numerous

patrons were near, and from time to time he stopped before the larger buildings, hoping to attract attention and dispose of his pies. At one of these moments, as he stood with his eyes raised to the windows of a grand palace, he was suddenly surrounded by a band of drunken soldiers belonging to the turbulent army corps formerly designated by the Russians under the name of *Strelitzes*.

“Hollo !” they cried out as they reeled towards him ; “take care, you little rascal ; look where you are going, and don’t thrust your basket against us as if trying to pierce us through. What have you in it? Come, let us see at once.”

Saying this four or five of them extended their hands and endeavored to remove the napkin which covered the pies. The boy resisted them with all his strength ; for he justly feared that his pastry would be confiscated for the benefit of the soldiers without any pecuniary advantage to himself.

“Stop, stop, I implore you in the name of heaven !” he exclaimed. “These pies were not baked for you, but for the gracious Czar

Peter; for the Czar, I tell you, and each is worth a silver rouble."

"I care not whether they are destined for the Czar Peter or the Czar Ivan, or for the Princess Sophia," replied one of the Strelitzes with a grimace intended for a smile. "They will disagree with us none the more on that account, and we wish to know how your dainties taste."

The young pie-vender, however, continued to defend his basket against the attack of the intoxicated men, repeating in a loud voice all the time that the pies were for the Czar Peter. Overpowered, however, by the number of his assailants, he was on the point of abandoning the contest, when perceiving an officer approaching, he called lustily for aid.

"What are you about?" he said to the soldiers in a harsh and threatening manner. The men, terrified by the sight of the uniform of their interrogator, did not stop to reply, but made good their escape as quickly as possible.

"What was the difficulty between you and the Strelitzes?" the officer asked the boy,

as out of breath and heated from the struggle in which he had been engaged, he lifted the napkin from the basket to examine the condition of the contents.

He was so preoccupied by this inspection that he did not even raise his eyes, as he answered mechanically:

"The blackguards were trying to seize my pies."

"But why did you continue to repeat the name of the Czar Peter?" inquired the officer.

"Oh! that was only a little stratagem," replied the young man, now regarding his liberator with a grateful smile. "I hoped by using his name to inspire them with some respect for my property. Besides, the Czar Peter is one of my best customers; he often buys my pies."

"Take my advice and do not proclaim that from the house-tops. The Princess Sophia might be displeased if she knew you preferred the Czar Peter to herself and to the Czar Ivan. She does not jest about such affairs. Therefore, be prudent."

"That will not trouble me; I sing my

song in honor of the one who patronizes me," said the pie-vender. "If the Princess Sophia was one of my customers, and if she was as affable and kind to me as the good Czar Peter, I would love her also."

"Be constant in your affection for the Czar Peter," added the officer. "He will, no doubt, continue to be your patron. He is to dine to-day with Prince Lolopof, whose cook may not be skilled like yourself in the art of making delicious pastry. Suppose you go to the Lolopof Palace and offer your dainties for sale."

Having said this, he walked off without waiting for a reply.

The advice was not lost on the boy. He immediately directed his steps towards the palace of the prince, and standing before it commenced his usual cry, hoping to be called in. But no one, apparently, saw or heard him. Noticing that the door was partly open, he boldly entered the large hall, made his way to the steward's apartment, and in a low voice said to the head cook:

"Will you not buy some of the pies which the Czar Peter likes so much?"

He answered harshly: "No, we make them ourselves."

It so happened that the steward heard the petition of the boy, and he asked him :

"Who made these pies? How do you know that the Czar Peter is fond of them?"

"They are made," replied the young pie-vender, "by the celebrated pastry cook, Legrain, formerly of Paris, and the Czar Peter often buys them from me."

"In that case go to the kitchen and wait awhile," said the steward. "I will tell my master ; sit down until I return."

The servant withdrew and the boy seated himself on a bench in a corner of the room. He waited patiently for a long time. At first he inhaled with pleasure the delicious odor of the various dishes which were being prepared in the kitchen. But being very weary from his long walk of the morning and his subsequent contest with the Strelitzes, the poor child found it impossible to resist the drowsiness which came over him. His eyes closed, his head dropped, his hands relaxed their hold upon the basket

containing his merchandise, which, however, rested upon his knees, being prevented from falling by the double leathern straps attached to it.

He was asleep when the steward re-entered the kitchen. The latter immediately made a sign to the head cook, and addressing the scullions and aids, ordered them to go at once to the cellar and help the servants to bring up three hundred bottles of wine.

As soon as they had disappeared, the steward whispered a few words to the head cook, who nodded assent and replied in a low voice :

“Would it not be better to take the basket gently from the boy and carry out our design in the next room?”

“By no means,” replied the steward. “It would take too much time, and the boy might waken before we had finished.”

“It is not necessary to sprinkle the powder over all the pies,” urged the cook.

“No, no, they must all be equally powdered,” said the steward; “we should betray ourselves if they should discover poison only on those intended for the Czar,

whilst the rest remained untouched. We must so manage that suspicion will rest solely on the boy and his master. Of course, in order to prevent the affair from being noised abroad inopportunately, we will not dismiss the young man until a few moments before the pies are served."

The two men approached the sleeping boy, cautiously raised the napkin which covered the basket, and sprinkled over all the pies a white powder, resembling sifted sugar. Gently replacing the napkin the steward left the room. The head cook returned to the range, and lifting the top of a large copper boiler, threw it on the ground. The noise made by the utensil in falling roused the pie-vender, so that he was thoroughly awake when the aids re-entered the kitchen. They were followed by the steward, who ordered dinner to be served. Then addressing the young man aloud so as to be heard by all he said :

"Now, my boy, let me see your pies. I will buy a dozen, for the Czar may like them."

The request was most cheerfully complied

with. Having paid him, the steward ordered him not to loiter there but to leave at once. He did not wait for a repetition of the command, but withdrew in haste, walking rapidly until he reached the corner of the street. There he halted, and depositing his half-empty basket on the ground, began gayly to calculate the profit of his morning sales.

“One, two, three, four roubles,” he said in a low tone to himself. “Five copeks, ten, fifteen, twenty.” Suddenly stopping in his count he cried aloud:

“Begone, you rogue! Stop thief! Oh, my pies!” Saying these words he sprang towards a dog, which, allured by the delicious odor of the contents of the basket, had thrust his nose under the napkin and seized a pie, which disappeared immediately down the throat of the animal. Seeing that it was impossible to prevent his loss, he considered it a useless waste of time to chastise the beast, and thought it more prudent to make good his retreat as soon as possible. Therefore he hastened to adjust the straps of his basket, but the poor

boy could not be consoled for the loss he had sustained. "Alas!" he exclaimed, "my master will deduct that from the amount due me, and I shall derive no benefit from my day's labor. What will my poor mother say when I return to her empty-handed? Oh, the rascal! I wish he would choke this very instant!" This unchristian malediction was apparently about to be realized. The animal at first lay motionless, but soon began to writhe and moan as though suffering intensely. His moans were shortly changed into frightful howls, which excited the compassion of the boy. Many of those who were passing by stopped to inquire what was the matter, but no one seemed able to assign a cause for the terrible convulsions of the poor beast, which became more and more violent every instant. At last one among the crowd said: "The dog has been poisoned."

At these words a horrible suspicion flashed through the mind of the young man. True, he had dozed for some time in the kitchen of the Lolopof Palace, but his sleep

was not so heavy as to prevent him from noticing the deep silence which succeeded the departure of the scullions. He recalled as a dream a whispered conversation between the steward and the head cook, and although he did not entirely understand what they said, his ear had caught a few words which he now remembered and which excited strange suspicions. Moreover, he well knew that the Princess Sophia, vexed by the intellectual superiority of her younger brother, Czar Peter, preferred to him her feeble-minded, sickly brother Ivan. Ambitious and designing, she contemplated leaving in his hand the imperial sceptre, but, in reality, herself exercising the sovereign power. A certain number of the nobility entered into her views. The idea then might naturally arise that an attempt had been made to make way with the young Czar by poison, a crime not unfrequent in Russia at that period. The thought came like an inspiration to the mind of the pastry cook's apprentice, and he began to tremble for the life of his imperial patron; for the dog soon expired amid atrocious suffering.

It was with a voice choked by deep emotion that he related to the ever-increasing, inquisitive crowd how the animal had died in horrible tortures after eating a pie taken from his basket. He added that his pies were excellent ; they could have been poisoned only in the kitchen of the Lolopof Palace, and that in all probability some had been served to the Czar Peter. He conjured those present to go forthwith to notify the young Czar, and save his life if possible.

At these words there arose a frightful tumult. Every instant had added to the numbers collected around the spot where the dog lay, and as if moved by the same impulse, they turned their steps towards the Lolopof Palace. Two strong men of gigantic stature lifted the boy with his basket, placed him on their shoulders, and headed the procession. The rest of the crowd, arming themselves with stones, sticks or any such weapon as came to hand, followed at a rapid pace, swearing that if any injury had been inflicted on the young Czar, they would not spare a creature in the palace, nor leave one stone of it upon another. But

Providence had watched over the prince. Contrary to his custom, Peter, at the very commencement of the banquet, had entered upon a long conversation with the noblemen seated near him at table. The dish containing the poisoned pies had been before him for some time; and his hypocritical host had repeatedly reminded him that the pastry was getting cold. But as often as he extended his hand to the dish, a remark was made which interested him and engaged his attention. At last, however, to the delight of Lolopof, Peter helped himself to one of the pies, and was on the point of conveying a piece which he held on his fork to his mouth, when the violent uproar of the crowd was heard under the palace windows.

“Czar Peter!” vociferated hundreds of voices, “where are you? Show yourself to us that we may see for ourselves that you are alive. Beloved Czar, come forth! Death to the traitors!”

At these words Lolopof became as pale as a corpse. The young Czar sprang from his seat and rushed to the window, followed by all the guests. When the multitude

beheld the prince their joy found vent in enthusiastic shouts.

“Hurrah, hurrah for Czar Peter! Death to the poisoners!”

Wholly at a loss to understand these menaces the Czar beckoned to the people to keep silence. He then asked:

“What is the matter? What do you wish?”

The tumult recommenced. Some began to relate what had happened, others to utter threats. All clamored at the same time so that it was impossible to understand the causes leading to so great a commotion. Every hand, however, pointed towards the pie-vender, who was trying to raise his voice above the confused murmur around him.

Smiling at the strange and inexplicable scene, the Czar addressed one of his aids:

“Lefort,” he said, “go and inquire the meaning of the tumult. Truly it is a confusion of tongues. Some cry ‘Hurrah!’ others ‘Pies!’ and others ‘Poison!’ or ‘Death and Massacre!’ If we were timid we should be terrified.”

The officer, who happened to be the

same who had liberated the apprentice-boy from the hands of the Strelitzes, was about to execute the orders of his sovereign, when he met on the staircase the head of the column, which had entered the palace preceded by the two men bearing on their shoulders the young pie-vender.

“What can be the cause of such an uproar?”

Having heard the details of all that had passed, he restored calm by assuring them that the Czar had not touched the poisoned pies, and he begged them to disperse quietly. But the multitude refused to retire until they had seen Peter return to the imperial palace, and exacted from him a promise to submit the affair of the pies to a rigorous investigation, and to punish severely those who were guilty.

CHAPTER II.

COMMENCEMENT OF A BRILLIANT CAREER.

IN spite of the promises made by the young Czar, the affair was hushed up from various motives. The people were led to believe that the whole was a mistake on the part of the boy. Nevertheless the chief cook and the steward of Prince Lolopof disappeared. The prince himself was sent in the quality of ambassador to a foreign court; for it was necessary to protect him from the vengeance of the citizens, who persisted in suspecting him of a criminal attempt upon the life of Peter. In reality, he owed his escape from punishment to the intercession of the Princess Sophia, to whose influence the Czar thought it more prudent to yield.

He was convinced, however, that he was indebted for his preservation from death to

the little pie-vender, and this conviction was for him the foundation of a brilliant future, and the cause of the dignities and honors which were lavished upon him.

His name was Alexander Menshikoff, and he was the son of a poor peasant of the environs of Moscow. He had pleased the adjutant, or rather the intimate friend of the Czar, the celebrated Lefort, who, recognizing in him a superior intellect, took him in his service. The young dependant acquired daily more and more the confidence and affection of his master, to whom in a short time, he became almost indispensable.

After having been a few weeks with Lefort, Alexander obtained a leave of absence for two or three days that he might pay a visit to his mother: his father had been dead several years. What happiness he experienced in relating to this excellent woman the amelioration of his condition!

“Ah! dear Mother, imagine my good fortune,” he said. “Look at the fine clothes I am now wearing; see the lace and the gilt buttons. But these are nothing to be compared to the splendid coats and

vests which pass through my hands when they need shaking and dusting. And how sweet is their perfume! Very different from the odor of the pies I used to sell, delicious as they were! And then what shall I tell you of the table at my new master's? Your cabbage soup is not half so good as the soup they serve us there. But better than all this, I am every day in the presence of the Czar Peter and the great lords of the Court. Oh! if you could only see the palace in which I live! There is gold wherever you turn: the dishes, plates, chandeliers, knives, forks, spoons, even the wash-basins are of gold. And because I informed the Czar of the poisoned pies, he is so good and kind to me. The other day, when his usual valet happened not to be at hand, he sent me for his court-dress. Oh, Mother! I trembled with wonder at seeing in my hands that magnificent coat, which shone with diamonds. Would you believe it? The smallest of the jewels was worth more than all the houses of our village, the fields and meadows together. How happy he must be to wear so costly precious

stones! I have remarked, however, that ever since the adventure of the pies, the the Czar has become distrustful. He is very careful not to eat at once what is placed before him. Last week, the Princess Sophia sent him a delicious pie and some tarts. He did not so much as touch them. Pie and tart all fell to the share of the domestics. I had a good portion, and nearly made myself sick. If the Czar takes a fancy to some of these delicacies, he requires me to make them of flour which I myself have purchased from the first dealer I find convenient. These grand people lead a strange life. When you are rising in the morning to begin your work, they are just going to bed. They breakfast at the hour you dine. In the evening they dine and remain hours at table, and God knows how they can consume such a quantity of food.

After dinner they play cards until morning. This is their usual way of living. Neither Lefort nor the Czar cares to pass his time in this manner, and they only do so when it is absolutely necessary. As for me, I am not destined to be a servant all my

life. My master has been good to have me taught reading, writing, arithmetic, French, and many other things of which you have not the least idea. I acknowledge that it is harder work to study all this than it was to sell pies in the street. But I devote myself willingly to my books, because it pleases General Lefort, and besides it is advantageous to myself."

As he said these words, he drew from his pocket a handful of gold pieces and handed them to his mother.

"This, dear mother, is a very small portion of the large debt I owe you, for the affection and kindness you have lavished upon me from my infancy. I can never repay you ; but it shall ever be my endeavor to contribute as far as possible to your happiness."

The good peasant woman was moved to tears by this evidence of the filial devotion of her son. She gave him her maternal benediction, and from the depths of her heart prayed God to grant him success in his efforts to make his way in the world.

God granted her petition. Alexander ad-

vanced daily in favor with his master and the Czar : to both he gave evidence of an ever increasing zeal, devotion, and unalterable fidelity. A dependant endowed with such qualities is seldom found ; consequently, upon the young pie-vender were bestowed honors and dignities in no small measure.

Scarcely was he of age when he was elevated to the office of secretary to the Czar ; he married a young girl named Matinka, of his own rank in life, but gifted with great good sense and the noblest qualities of the heart. Their union was blessed by God, and no happiness could surpass that of the young imperial scribe when he took possession of the modest frame house which he had built at Moscow with the small sum he had laid by from his wages, and where he gave a home to his mother, from whom he was unwilling to be separated. He would not have changed his condition with the Czar himself, and when God had given him two children, a boy and a girl, his happiness was at its height ; he esteemed no lot more enviable than his own. As soon as he arose in the morning, at noon before seating himself at

table, and in the evening when returning from work, his first thought was of his children. He took them in his arms, caressed them, and guided their tottering steps as they learned to walk; every day he carried them some toy or bon-bon. In return they loved him with all the devotion of which their little hearts were capable. As the mother would go to meet him after his day's work, holding the baby Helen in her arms, the child would clap her hands and scream with joy. Florent would spring into his arms and kiss him over and over again. Matinka's eyes sparkled with delight, and the good grandmother completed this touching picture of a happy home. If, as it sometimes happened, one of the children was indisposed, what anxiety, what anguish he experienced! He arose frequently during the night in order to assure himself they were not seriously ill. He would pass hours at their bedside. On Sundays and festivals it was a delightful recreation to the family to spend a few hours in the country, with Matinka's parents. Not one thought of envy crossed their minds as they saw the

rich driving by them in their magnificent equipage; theirs was the greater wealth, contentment with their lot, and the happiness of loving hearts.

CHAPTER III.

GREATNESS BEWILDERS.

SUCH, as described above, was the happiness enjoyed by Menshikoff for many years.

At last, the Czar, who appreciated his fine qualities, elevated him to the rank of Councillor. This promotion, which should have been a fortunate event for his family, was the cause of bitter sorrow to Matinka. The first time that Menshikoff returned home in the splendid court-dress worn by the Imperial Councillors, Florent, as usual, ran joyously to meet him, and attempted to spring into his arms. But instead of caressing the child as he was wont to do, he pushed him away roughly, saying in an angry tone:

“What a rude boy you are! your soiled boots will spoil a suit which has cost me a large sum of money.” A moment afterwards he said more gently to little Helen

who smilingly extended her hands to him :
“ I cannot take you in my arms ; you would rumple the frill of my shirt, and tarnish my buttons.”

“ And will you also refuse to embrace me ? ” asked his afflicted wife.

“ Certainly, as long as I wear this fine uniform. But have a little patience ; wait until I put on my ordinary clothes.”

However, when he returned, after laying aside his handsome coat, the children, repulsed by his salutation on entering, were too timid to approach him, and even the mother could not embrace her husband with the same unrestrained affection, now that he seemed to value her love less than his court-suit. Apparently, he did not notice the change : his mind was preoccupied with other thoughts. For a time he walked up and down in silence, glancing around the room, then he said :

“ Our furniture must be replaced by other more suitable to our present condition. Those miserable straw-chairs, that old sofa, the chest of drawers, the broken looking-glass, can no longer remain here, nor can we

in future, use earthenware dishes, iron forks and pewter spoons. An Imperial Councillor requires a service of porcelain, and silver-plate."

"And yet we were very happy with our simple furniture, our earthenware dishes, and pewter spoons," replied Matinka gently, but somewhat reproachfully. "Shall we increase our happiness by introducing luxury into our home?"

"That has nothing to do with it," said Menshikoff. "Our happiness is not in question. We are simply considering the requirements of our new position."

Having said this, or rather muttered the words to himself, he remained a few moments absorbed in thought. Then, as if having come to a determination, he approached the window, threw open the blind, and accosted a Jew who happened to be passing at the time.

"Hollo! my friend, stop! I want to speak with you."

But whether it was that the Jew did not hear him call, or whether he did not care to answer, he passed on quietly without noticing Menshikoff.

“The saucy fellow!” exclaimed the Imperial Councillor, purple from rage. “He does not condescend even to look towards me. Of course, he takes me for a cheesemonger, and does not suspect that such a house as this is the residence of a Councillor of his Majesty, the Emperor, or certainly he would not so coolly disregard a request to enter. But a change must be made. What man of respectability would be willing to climb our rough staircase, and enter a room of which the ceiling is so low that one can scarcely stand erect without striking it with his head? And then what possibility is there of suspending in it a chandelier, or hanging curtains at windows which strongly resemble those of a cabin on board of a vessel! We must, at once, procure another house. That is an absolute necessity.”

“My dear son,” said his old mother, “hear what I have to say. Remain in the house where you have tasted pleasures so pure and unalloyed. Believe me, happiness does not dwell in palaces. They are the abodes of treachery and death; the affair of the poisoned pies teaches this truth. As for myself,

my happiest days were passed in the village hut. It was only my love for you which induced me to leave it. Now that I have become accustomed to our home here, must I be forced to abandon the spot I have learned to value for your sake, to dwell in the large and comfortless rooms of a lordly mansion ! It would cause my death, because it would be the knell of my happiness."

"And besides," continued Matinka, "how dear to me are all the objects which surround us. What sweet recollections of past joys they awaken ! Do you not remember, my beloved husband, that on the day of our marriage we drank to our future from that earthen mug with the blue band around the edge ? Those delft dishes and plates were a bridal present offered me by my companions. And you have not forgotten that the chest of drawers was a wedding gift made you by your old friends ?"

Alexander seemed lost in thought for a few moments, then rousing himself, he said to his old mother :

"Mother, you are right. It would, indeed be a cruelty to remove you from a spot

which long habit has endeared to you. Therefore, remain here. This house, henceforth, belongs to you."

Then addressing his wife, he said:

"Matinka, the old furniture and utensils will still remind us of the happy years we have passed together, and the recollection of them will be renewed every time we come to visit our dear mother. I shall not sell a single article."

"Then you intend to separate from me?" exclaimed the old woman. "I shall no longer see my grandchildren around me? O my God! Can it be that he is ashamed of his poor mother, now that he has been elevated to so high a rank?"

"Dear mother, how can you entertain such a thought! It was my love for you which suggested the proposition I have just made. If the plan I propose is not agreeable to you, come with us. The spacious and lofty apartments of our future dwelling, with their immense windows and their superb furniture, will naturally appear strange to you. But I can easily relieve you of any uncomfortable feeling you might thus experi-

ence. We can, I am sure, find a retired and quiet little room, to which you could withdraw occasionally when persons of rank come to visit us. Therefore, dear mother, make your choice. Make our house your home, if agreeable to you ; if you prefer it, you are free to remain here, and in that case, the children shall visit you every day. You shall have a servant whose only occupation shall be to attend to your wants."

As she listened to his words, tears flowed down the cheeks of the poor woman.

"Ah!" she said, sobbing aloud, "the hands of a mercenary are not like those of a child. When you were small, I would not, for the whole world, have confided you to the care of another, and I did hope than at my last hour, the hands of my son would close my eyes. But—" Here sobs choked her utterance. No one had the courage to speak, not even Menshikoff, who seemed deeply moved.

Recovering after a while from her emotion, the old mother resumed: "But when the hour of my death arrives, my lips will, in vain, murmur the name of my son ; in vain

shall I extend my trembling hand to grasp his in a last farewell."

"Mother, dear mother, stop, I implore you," exclaimed her son, beside himself with emotion. "You break my heart. Away with those worthless honors which bring sorrow to my mother's heart. Be consoled, dear mother. I will supplicate the Emperor to restore me to my original condition; for, I wish ever to be to you a grateful and devoted son. And yet, I thought my preferment would give you pleasure."

"No, no," interrupted the good old woman, as she wiped away her tears. "No, I do not wish that. Retain the high position conferred on you by the Czar, and receive with gratitude the favors he bestows upon you. God wills it. I will accept with resignation all the sacrifices this will impose on me. Do then, my child, whatever you consider right and best."

For some moments Menshikoff seemed restless and undecided. Then he exclaimed:

"That cannot be. If I remain Imperial

Councillor, I shall be necessarily compelled to take a house in the neighborhood of the palace, where in my own apartments I can attend to the duties of my office without interruption. Far better then will it be for me not to undertake duties which would cost so dear."

"No, no," replied his mother, eagerly. "I have been too exacting and anxious without cause. Forget what I said, and fulfil the duties of your charge."

"I shall abide by your decision," replied the son, delighted by the words just addressed to him. "In truth, your view of the affair was too gloomy. Let us then be again cheerful and happy, accepting the good fortune which may present itself to us."

Turning to Matinka he said:

"Take this money, my dear Matinka, and buy some wine, the very best, and long live the excellent Czar! We must drink his health at dinner."

At table, however, a new annoyance awaited the poor Matinka. She had prepared in the best possible manner the

dishes of which she knew her husband was fond ; but instead of eating of them with appetite, he barely touched them to his lips.

“Is not the food seasoned to your taste?” she asked anxiously. “Or is there anything else you would like to make them palatable?”

Menshikoff was much embarrassed. He answered hesitatingly :

“Do not be angry, my dear wife. Your dinners were always excellent, and the simple fare suited our former condition, but now that we are in a more elevated rank, it does not become us to keep the table of a peasant. In future, I desire four or five courses every day. Besides, it is beneath the dignity of the wife of an Imperial Councillor to pass her time in the kitchen preparing the meals and cleaning the cooking utensils. I intend to engage a cook to do the work for you.”

These remarks fell like a thunderbolt upon Matinka. She had always prided herself upon her cooking, and had studied her husband's tastes in the preparation of the food ; his appreciation of her efforts and

his compliments upon her success, had ever been a sweet recompense for the daily toil entailed upon her by their humble condition. Consequently, both her self-love and affections were wounded, when she found that he was willing to commit to the hands of a hireling, that duty which had been her delight because it contributed to his gratification. However, she made no reply, but with tearful eyes drank the wine, which instead of rejoicing her heart, filled it with bitterness.

From that time the happiness of the Menshikoff family diminished daily; nor were they compensated for its loss by the luxuries of their new home, which pleased the eye, but did not satisfy the heart. When the Imperial Councillor removed to his handsome residence near the palace of the Czar, his mother did not accompany him, but continued to occupy the modest frame building which had so long sufficed for their simple desires.

Two footmen, a coachman, a cook, and two waiting maids were engaged; a carriage and two horses were purchased.

This addition to their household was the cause of much trouble to poor Matinka. Hitherto, her only care had been to watch over her children and to correct the little faults common to their age; now, she had daily new difficulties to contend with. At one time she was forced to reprove the carelessness of the servants; again, their dishonesty; some stole, others wasted the store of provisions, whilst others gave bad example to the children.

At first, Menshikoff never failed to visit his mother every day. Then his multiplied occupations furnished him an excuse for going less frequently, until, by degrees he ceased his visits entirely. Matinka and the two children kept their word, and endeavored by their affectionate attentions to console her for the loss of her son's society; and indemnify her, as far as possible, for his neglect.

The time which the father had been accustomed to devote to his family became also gradually less. Often on his return from the palace, he was in an ill humor; for the Czar, being hasty and quick tempered,

was not, on all occasions considerate of his Councillor ; he, on the other hand, was not willing to tolerate what, as servant, copyist and secretary, he had endured patiently ; and not daring to testify to his master the irritation he really felt, the whole weight of his displeasure fell on his unoffending family. As often as he returned home in such a disposition, the children trembled and kept out of his way, whilst Matinka would greet him affectionately, and endeavor, by her caresses, to calm the storm which seemed ready to expend itself upon the innocent little creatures whom he should have sheltered from every evil. He often remained the entire day shut up in his study, when even his wife dared not enter for any purpose whatever. He was frequently absent from home in the evening, returning late at night in a state of intoxication. If it happened that he lost heavily at cards—not an uncommon occurrence—he vented his ill humor by inflicting on his family every kind of annoyance which circumstances would suggest. The only relaxation allowed Matinka was an occasional

drive ; she was forced to discontinue the visits she had been accustomed to make her parents every Sunday. She now saw them only by stealth, to avoid exciting her husband's anger.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PATRONAL FEAST.

THE festival of the patron saint of the father of a family is celebrated in Russia with peculiar solemnity, and this pious custom had been religiously observed in the house of Menshikoff. On every anniversary, Matinka had always contrived an agreeable surprise for her husband. But now she was wholly at a loss what to devise for one who, blinded by pride and ambition, was a total stranger to the influences of the simple joys of home. She tortured her imagination without result. He himself, however, relieved her anxiety. Two weeks before the day, he said in an affectionate manner to which she had long been unaccustomed:

“Dear Matinka, you can do me a great favor on my Saint’s day.”

"Tell me, dear Alexander," she replied joyously, "in what way I can contribute to your pleasure? I shall be too happy to carry out your wishes."

"I desire to give a dinner to my aristocratic acquaintances. I have feared for some time, that we might be suspected of avarice because we do not entertain our friends. I, therefore, beg you to prepare for a grand dinner on my Saint's day, to which we will invite the *élite* of Moscow. Your toilette must be suitable to the occasion and to a lady of your rank. I shall order what is necessary for you. Besides"—

Here he suddenly stopped, as if ashamed to express his idea fully.

"What more, dear Alexander? Tell me."

"You are an excellent woman, good, beautiful you are a pious, devoted mother, a superior housewife; but, but—"

"Speak out candidly, I pray you, my dear husband," said his wife with anxiety.

"You are deficient in one thing you are ignorant of the etiquette of society; your manners are not those of a lady of

rank. If wanting in this respect, in vain will a woman possess a noble heart and be gifted with more than ordinary intellect ; she will certainly be an object of ridicule. To persons elevated in the social scale, frivolous conversation and exaggerated compliments are more agreeable than simplicity of language and sincerity. You are a real diamond, a priceless jewel to me : but on account of your extreme modesty, you are to others a diamond in the rough. I cannot tell you how it pains me to see that you are not properly appreciated outside your family. But a little practice will soon remedy the only defect I find in you."

"Tell me what I must do to relieve you of this vexation."

"I shall engage the French dancing master, Mr. Genou, to give lessons to our Florent, and teach him how to bow, to hold himself gracefully, and to join in the chit-chat of a drawing-room. You will be present at his lessons, and I wish you to repeat afterwards by yourself all you have learned. A few days before the dinner, we will rehearse all together what has been

acquired from Mr. Genou, and I am confident that every thing will pass off to our satisfaction."

With a heavy sigh Matinka promised to comply with her husband's request.

In the afternoon the dancing master arrived, and poor Florent commenced the instructions so distasteful to him. He was made to walk the floor as stiff a sentinel, to bow over and over again to the right and left, to salute repeatedly empty chairs and divans. New directions were given at every instant. "Hold yourself straight! Throw back your shoulders! Keep your head up! Don't drag your feet upon the floor! Turn your toes out! Don't swing your arms! Make a bow! Lower—not so low!"

The child soon became disgusted with these exercises and wept bitterly. But it made no difference; he was forced to submit to the torture inflicted by Mr. Genou. The following day he was made to stand upon a board, so arranged as to keep the toes turned out, and he had much difficulty in preserving his balance.

But these exercises were far more painful

to Matinka. Her husband superintended them, and scolded the poor woman unmercifully every time she made a mistake, or went through an exercise awkwardly. How frequently in her own mind she contrasted her past life, at no very distant period, when she was happy in her humble home with her husband's love, with her present grandeur and the unmeaning ceremonies to which he was striving to habituate her.

But her trials did not end here. For several days the tables and chairs were strewn with silks, velvets, laces and other dress materials, from which she was directed to make her selection. Afterwards came the mantua-maker, shoemaker, and jeweller, the last offering for her choice the most magnificent sets of diamonds and other precious stones. The gold pieces disappeared as readily as though their garden were traversed by the Pactolus.

When the mantua-maker tried on her new dress, a deep blush crimsoned Matinka's cheeks as she turned to her husband and asked :

“Do you wish me to appear before company in so immodest an attire?”

Menshikoff shrugged his shoulders and replied: “You will soon become accustomed to it; fashion requires it.”

Although deeply wounded, she was silent, but when her maid began to tighten the corsets which had been brought her, she could not restrain herself and involuntarily exclaimed: “Stop, stop! I cannot breathe in this whalebone case; you stifle me!”

“You must submit,” said Menshikoff, in an imperious manner. “Elegance requires it. If corsets produced suffocation, very many women would die every day.”

The poor creature patiently permitted herself to be encased in what was to her an instrument of torture. When the maid completed her dress by adjusting to it an enormous pannier, Matinka declared that it would be impossible for her to enter the door.

“Then pass through sideways,” replied Menshikoff, who had an expedient ready for every objection.

Finally, they forced upon the feet of the unfortunate woman a pair of shoes much too

narrow for her, of which the heels were so high that she was in danger of falling at every step. Seeing that his wife was vainly endeavoring to conceal the suffering she was enduring, Menshikoff attempted to console her by saying :

“Have a little patience, my dear wife. This will not last long. After the dinner party, you may, if you choose, resume the dress which is most comfortable to you and to which you are accustomed.”

“Tell me, if you can,” replied Matinka, “what brain ever imagined all these silly things which seem to have been invented only to deform and render ridiculous the work of God.”

“I will solve the enigma for you, said Menshikoff smiling. “A very small woman who wished to appear tall invented high heels and the arrangement of the hair on the top of the head. A stout woman, envying her friends their slender and elegant forms, hoped to become like them by wearing the corset, or rather a case of steel and whale-bone. Another attempted to conceal her age, betrayed by the gray which streaked

her hair, by the use of powder, and flattered herself that a covering of paint on her faded cheeks would restore to them, in appearance at least, the freshness of youth, and so with the rest."

"But is there any reason why I, who am neither too short nor too stout, who am not faded and gray, should adopt so preposterous a style of dress?"

"Fashion requires it, my dear Matinka, as I have already told you," replied Menshikoff.

"And what do you mean by fashion, which is powerful enough to enforce decrees so tyrannical?"

Menshikoff left the question unanswered; for, he knew not how to define fashion, that blind spirit of imitation which influences all men.

At last, the preparations for the great day were completed. The guests were invited, the rooms were decorated; the wine-cellar and store-rooms were stocked.

The day before the dinner, Matinka was obliged to undergo an examination by her husband of all she had learned, and to practise in his presence the part she was to enact

before his guests. It is scarcely credible that so intelligent a man as Menshikoff would condescend to anything so puerile. And yet, the man who could with difficulty spare a few moments daily from the duties of his office to devote to his family, passed several hours for two days in forming his wife to frivolous customs, and to all the silly and absurd compliments which constitute the conversation of what is called high society.

Instructing her, he said : "Imagine, that I am a lady of rank, one of the invited guests : I enter the reception room to pay my respects to you ; you return my salutation cordially, saying that you are happy to see me, having desired for a long time to make my acquaintance."

"But," interrupted Matinka, "that is not true ; I should tell a falsehood were I to use such language."

"My dear, you must tell a falsehood," replied Menshikoff. "That is the custom of good society. People always say they are most happy to meet those whom, in their hearts, they would wish at the antipodes.

They are most affectionate and complimentary to persons for whom they in reality feel the greatest aversion. This constitutes the politeness of the world of fashion."

The candid, loyal heart of Matinka was unable to comprehend the explanation given her. However, she rehearsed her part to the best of her ability, in order to give pleasure to her husband. Nevertheless, he found much to censure: her courtesy was too low or too stiff; now she spoke too loud, again, not loud enough, and thus the farce terminated without satisfying Men-shikoff.

The approach of her husband's Saint's day had formerly been a cause of simple and pure joy to Matinka; she now anticipated it with deep anxiety, reflecting upon the part she was expected to enact before strangers. On the eve she had a high fever, and did not sleep the entire night.

Early in the morning the hair-dresser arrived. He burned, scorched and cut the beautiful hair of the poor woman. For a half hour he brushed and combed it, and when he considered it sufficiently pliant, he

placed upon her head a high frame of horse-hair around which he wound her own hair which he had previously plaited, the whole being kept in place by silver pins. Over this enormous pile he sprinkled white powder and completed her disfiguration by concealing the natural bloom of her cheeks under a layer of paint. The violent headache induced by the arranging of her hair was considerably increased after she was encased in the corsets and her feet were forced into the narrow shoes. Although to these sufferings was added mental anxiety, she was obliged to feign a happiness to which she was a stranger.

The company began to arrive, and the folding-doors of the spacious apartments were thrown open. Menshikoff appeared in his court-dress. He anxiously watched Matinka, who received the guests in a manner which agreeably surprised the master of the house. Her natural good sense and intelligence suggested many remarks which rendered her conversation pleasing. Unfortunately for her, Menshikoff heard a lady say in French to another: "Does not the

wife of the Imperial Councillor look like a simpleton?"

On hearing these words, his anger was roused, not against the offending visitor, but against his innocent wife, and his eyes rested on her with such an expression of rage, that she trembled like a leaf. His ill-humor was, happily, diverted by the entrance of the two children. Florent was dressed exactly like his father and formed a charming picture with his powdered wig and black silk net, his blue velvet coat, richly embroidered vest, his short breeches, silk stockings, gold shoe buckles and his tiny sword in a lacquered leathern scabbard. Helen, although only four years of age, was attired in every respect similar to her mother. The guests surrounded the children and vied with each other in admiring and caressing them. Blinded by vanity, Menshikoff recovered from the blow just inflicted upon his self-love and forgot what he himself had told his wife only the previous evening, that all such fine words and caresses were false and hypocritical.

The table was spread most sumptuously,

and the guests did justice to the luxuries placed before them. Course succeeded course with royal profusion. The rarest and most costly wines were passed around and drunk as freely as they drink in Russia. The company threw off the reserve which had rendered the dinner somewhat formal, and the conversation became more and more animated. In the midst of the entertainment, the door of the dining-room was opened, and an old woman, very simply, but neatly dressed, was about to enter, but stopped suddenly, and gazed with a kind of stupefaction upon the brilliant company in whose presence she unexpectedly found herself. This woman was Menshikoff's mother.

"I wish to see my son," she said, in an agitated manner. "Pardon me, but does not my Alexander still live here? Have I mistaken the house?"

Upon recognizing his mother, Menshikoff turned ashy pale, but soon recovering his self-possession he arose from the table.

"My good woman," he said, with forced affability as he advanced towards her, "here

I am. You make me happy in coming to see me. Follow me, we will converse alone for a few moments."

As he thus spoke, he gently drew the poor woman into an adjoining apartment without allowing her time to say more. Before leaving the dining-room, however, he turned towards the company and said:

"Permit me, ladies and gentlemen, to absent myself for a short time; I wish to speak with this good woman."

"It only needed this!" he muttered between his teeth with ill-concealed anger as he offered a seat to his mother. But suddenly resuming a cheerful countenance he said:

"You are welcome, mother. You are, indeed, kind in giving me the pleasure of a visit."

"My son," replied the old woman, "I am very feeble, but I made the effort to drag myself here to-day to offer you my best wishes and bestow upon you my maternal benediction. It is true, that I come empty-handed, but my heart is filled with the warmest affection for you. It has been a

very, very long time, my son, since I have seen you. Therefore you must pardon me for disturbing you at such a moment. It is uncertain if I shall ever again be able to meet you in your own home. Had I known, however, that you were entertaining so large a company—”

“Dear mother,” interrupted Menshikoff, “I am grateful to you for your affectionate remembrance of my Saint’s day. I would gladly have invited you to be present at our little dinner-party, but I was aware that such assemblies were distasteful to you. I hope the servants have offered you refreshments and wine; if not, I—”

“My dear Alexander,” interrupted his mother, “that was not my object in coming. My food is always of the simplest kind. All I desired was to see you, to be in your company.”

“And yet,” said Menshikoff, with embarrassment, “I am forced to leave you. My duties as a host absolutely require me to return to my guests. But in my place I will send my wife and children.”

"Have your guests just arrived?" asked the mother.

"Oh, no, they have been here, at least, four hours."

"I suppose they are friends to whom you are under obligations," continued the old woman.

"Yes. I have been acquainted with some of them six months, and have been invited to their houses perhaps ten times. Certainly I owe them some return for such attentions."

"If you have devoted four hours to persons whom you have known only six months and who have invited you only ten times to dinner, it seems to me you could spare a quarter of an hour to your mother who has been your best friend for thirty-two years and who supported you for fifteen years," replied the old woman sternly.

Menshikoff fully appreciated the extent of his ingratitude, but instead of seeking to repair the wrong of which he had been guilty, he manifested still more clearly his discontent and answered coldly :

"Mother, I am sorry to leave you. I

will send my wife, who can remain with you for a short time, better than I can. But I hope to see you again before you leave."

Saying this, he returned to the dining-room without waiting for an answer.

The old woman did not attempt to follow him. The tears which flowed down her withered cheeks betokened the sorrow of her heart. A few moments afterwards the door opened and an unknown lady in full dress, accompanied by two children, also unknown, entered the room. The good old woman rose respectfully, but Matinka threw herself in her arms, and the children clung to her exclaiming joyously, "Grandmother! dear grandmother!"

When Matinka saw her mother-in-law at the door of the dining-room, her first impulse was to rush to welcome her, and she made a quick movement to rise from the table, but a glance from Menshikoff sufficed to restrain her, eager as she was to go. She was gratified by a request from her husband on his return to devote a few minutes to their old visitor.

Menshikoff was immediately overwhelmed with questions by the astonished guests.

"Is that old woman really your mother?" they asked.

"No, indeed," coolly replied the Imperial Councillor. "My excellent mother died long ago. The good woman you have just seen was my nurse, and still retaining her former affection for me she continues to regard me and treat me as her child. Why should I not allow the poor creature that innocent pleasure? Do you not think I am right?"

"Certainly, certainly," they all replied. And having thus, by a falsehood relieved himself from the embarrassment caused by the appearance of his mother, the ungrateful son, ashamed of her who from his infancy had lavished upon him all the treasures of a boundless affection, thought no more of her.

The case was far otherwise with Matinka and her children, who hastened joyfully to embrace the good woman.

As she examined the elegant dress of her daughter-in-law, the mother, shaking her head in sign of disapprobation said :

"My dear child, you are so changed I hardly recognized you. I love Matinka in her simple dress far more than Matinka transformed into a great lady. I dare not approach to embrace you."

Matinka replied with a sigh: "Do you think I am comfortable with this pannier of whalebones, one of which I broke as I entered the door, and with this weight on my head? What pain I suffer from my tight shoes and the corsets which impede my breath! I am also mortified to appear with painted cheeks."

The children were equally loud in their lamentations.

"Look!" cried Florent, with a comical expression of pain. "What an enormous net they have fastened to the back of my head!"

As he spoke, he shook his head so violently that a cloud of white powder fell upon his blue velvet coat.

"Why!" exclaimed the grandmother in astonishment, "how does it happen that your hair has grown so much in so short a time!"

"It is all false hair, grandmother; see,"

and as he spoke, the boy took from his head the borrowed coif and presented it to the amazed old woman.

"I could put up with the wig," he added, "if they had given me a real sword. But as to this, it is nothing but an empty scabbard attached to a hilt."

Throwing the wig on the floor, he began to thrust his mock sword against Helen's whalebone panier. As she retreated, he followed, until she fell, and Florent, losing his balance, rolled over her.

At this moment Menshikoff, displeased by his wife's long absence, re-entered the room to request her to return to the company. He saw the children struggling on the floor, noticed that the whalebone of his wife's pannier was broken and that it had become unfastened. In embracing her mother-in-law, a portion of the paint had been rubbed from her cheek, and as her tears followed another portion had fallen upon the lace of her dress. This did not escape his eye, and sufficed to excite his anger to such a degree that he was unable to control it. He roughly seized the chil-

dren, boxed them and pushed them aside in no gentle manner. Then addressing Matinka in a voice tremulous from passion, he said :

“Again you give me evidence that the copper of a sous can never be converted into the silver of a crown. You were born a peasant, and a peasant you will remain all the days of your life. You can now stay where you are. To present yourself in your present condition before my friends, would be a convincing proof to them of my folly in choosing you for my wife.”

Without a word to his mother, who had in vain endeavored to check his unkind remarks, he returned to his guests with a serene countenance and said calmly :

“My wife requests me to make her excuses to you. She is deeply chagrined at being deprived of the pleasure of your company, but a sudden attack of violent headache, to which she is subject, compels her to renounce the gratification of being with you.”

People of fashion have often recourse to similar falsehoods in order to rid themselves

of an importunate or disagreeable visitor, and as the individuals assembled around Menshikoff's table had used such stratagems upon different occasions, they attached no importance to the deceit he had practised. After a few expressions of regret for the indisposition of his wife, the gentlemen continued to drink their wine and the ladies assumed their conversation.

But Menshikoff's harsh language had sorely afflicted Matinka. Never before had he addressed to her words so bitter, nor reproaches so cruel. Thus then was she recompensed for exerting herself to the utmost to play the part of a great lady, and for having bade adieu to all the innocent joys which had formerly constituted her happiness. She suddenly realized her situation, and comprehended that the tie uniting her to her husband which she had considered eternal, might be dissolved. Had he not expressed his regret for having married her? What a terrible thought! The venerable grandmother exerted all her maternal eloquence to calm the affliction of her daughter-in law, although she stood so much

in need of consolation herself. They wept bitterly, mingling their tears with the sobs of the children, who were still suffering the effects of their father's harshness. At last, Matinka exchanged the fine dress which had caused her so much sorrow, for the simple costume which recalled the happy days of her peasant life. After accompanying her mother-in-law to her modest abode, and putting the children to bed she retired for the night, without, however, obtaining either sleep or tranquillity of mind.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEPARTURE AND THE RETURN.

NOT long after the dinner-party there occurred an event which, apparently, was to restore the half-broken tie uniting Menshikoff to his Matinka. This was a long journey he was to undertake with his master, the Czar.

This young prince, destined to be known in history under the name of Peter the Great, fully comprehended that he lacked the acquirements necessary to enable him to govern wisely and to civilize a great nation. He, therefore, resolved to travel through Europe and study for himself the centres of civilization, to scrutinize carefully those countries in which he should find most amply developed the art of war, ship-building, the sciences and trades, branches for which his admiration amounted to en-

thusiasm, and with which he was determined at any price to endow Russia, being persuaded that by these alone could she be elevated in the scale of nations above the rank she now occupied. Concealing his imperial dignity under the assumed title of a member of the legation which, according to a Russian custom, was appointed to visit foreign courts, he traversed Esthonia and Livonia, at that time subject to Sweden, Brandenburg, Hanover, Westphalia, and arrived at Amsterdam, where his passion for ship-building induced him to work as a carpenter and blacksmith. He even caused himself to be enrolled at Saardam among the laborers employed at the celebrated dock-yards of this city. He accepted an invitation from William III., king of England, to visit London; but wearing the dress of a sailor he passed the greater part of the time in inspecting the maritime establishments of the kingdom. The University of Oxford honored him by conferring upon him the degree of doctor. Having stored his mind with every kind of useful information, he returned

home to found the prosperity of the Russian Empire.

Menshikoff, the pastry cook's apprentice, by his intelligence, acuteness of intellect, and pliancy of character, had conciliated the favor of the young Czar, who elevated him to the post of Councillor of State, and designated him as one of the officers who were to form his *suité* during the journey he was about to undertake.

The prospect of a separation from his family had a salutary effect upon him, reviving his former affection. He behaved towards his mother, his wife and children with the same gentleness and tenderness as of yore; was solicitous to make every arrangement to contribute to their comfort and enable them to keep up the establishment in a style suitable to their position. He was overcome by emotion on taking leave of his family, assured them he would not forget them, and would inform them of all his movements. At first, he kept his promise faithfully. But by degrees his letters became less frequent, either because of the greater distance, or an increase of oc-

cupation, or some other unexpected obstacle.

Immediately after the departure of her husband, Matinka left the splendid dwelling in which Menshikoff had taken up his abode, returned to the small house occupied by her mother-in-law, and devoted her time to the care of the good old woman and of her children, for whom she engaged preceptors in all useful branches of study. She constantly held out to them as a motive for exertion, the pleasure their father would experience on his return at seeing their improvement. They were docile to her instructions, and gave her no cause for anxiety.

The old grandmother, however, failed daily in health and strength. Foreseeing that her death must be near at hand, she often said : "I shall never again see my Alexander. This thought would make me inconsolable, were it not for the hope of being reunited with him in eternity. I have lived long enough, God has been good to me. I should be ungrateful not to acknowledge this, but man is never entirely

satisfied, and I have ardently desired to die in the arms of my son. Nevertheless, God's will be done."

Her cherished wish was not gratified. Scarcely three months had passed after the departure of Menshikoff when she was called to the reward of her well-spent life. She died in the full possession of her senses, fortified by the aids of religion, and surrounded by her daughter-in law and her grandchildren.

Matinka had returned from paying the last rites to the dear departed one, and deeply dejected by the loss of her cherished mother, she was talking with her children of her and of their absent father, when the door was suddenly opened, a lieutenant of the Strelitzes entered, and threw his arms around her.

"My dear sister!" he exclaimed to the terrified woman, "do you not know your brother? Look at me; it is indeed myself."

"Ah! dear Simonow!" she said in a transport of joy, "I did not recognize you at first. But how does it happen that you

are here ? I feared I should never see you again."

"I have been admitted among the Strelitzes, of which I am very glad, as it brings me in your vicinity. But where is your husband ?"

As she was relating the cause of Menshikoff's absence, Simonow's countenance clouded, he shook his head in sign of disapprobation and said :

"Dear Matinka, you are not the only one who has cause to regret the prolonged absence of the Czar. The whole people, from the highest noble to the serf, complain of it bitterly. Instead of devoting his time to the welfare of his subjects, the Czar abandons the government to unworthy ministers, and amuses himself by travelling through Europe. In the mean time, the officers of the State are at full liberty to do as they please. He sets no value on his faithful Russians, but follows the advice of the foreigners by whom he loves to be surrounded. But let him beware ; to a certain point we will accept his innovations, but beyond that, he will not suc-

ceed as long as a Strelitzes can wield a sword."

"Brother," exclaimed Matinka anxiously, "you have hardly been admitted into a regiment of the Strelitzes, and already you have imbibed the spirit of insubordination which characterizes that corps. Will you never learn wisdom? What profit did your comrades derive from their last revolt? The gibbet or exile was their portion, and I fear that nothing short of their entire destruction will make them peaceable. I implore you, my dear brother, not to lend so ready an ear to the suggestions of your evil-minded companions. Leave the care of providing for the well-being of the country to Almighty God. If the Czar does not govern in a manner agreeable to the Divine Majesty, He is able to divest him of the power which he abuses. As for us, our duty is to render to the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor."

"You know nothing about such things," replied Simonow. "The duty of women is to be silent; that of men, is to act. Therefore, await in peace the issue of events."

Matinka's anxiety was not relieved ; on the contrary the words she had just heard increased the fears which were but too soon realized.

One evening, as Matinka was engaged with her children in their usual devotions, their attention was attracted by a commotion in the street which augmented every instant. There seemed to be a great crowd rushing to and fro, doors were violently thrown open, others, shut with a loud noise, and tumultuous cries were heard in the distance. The uneasiness of the mother, excited by the first sounds which fell upon her ear, was soon converted into extreme alarm when she plainly distinguished the report of fire-arms.

“ O my God ! ” she exclaimed in anguish, “ the Strelitzes are at work ! ”

She was right. The Strelitzes, to the number of seven thousand, had risen in rebellion, for the avowed purpose of deposing the Czar Peter, and elevating to the throne his half-sister, the Princess Sophia. The revolt soon spread through Moscow, and the combat became more general ; the

discharge of musketry mingled with the cries of the fugitives and the groans of the wounded. The greater part of the Strelitzes were intoxicated, and this unbridled soldiery made great havoc through the capital, menacing with death all the adherents of Peter. They soon began to put their threats into execution. How agonizing were Matinka's fears for her children! Her husband was well known as one of the greatest favorites of the young Czar, and in his absence, might they not wreak their vengeance on his family? Overpowered by terror she fell upon her knees and invoked the protection of Heaven for herself and the two innocent creatures she held in her arms. She had taken the precaution to extinguish the lamp, but the light from the fires kindled by the rebels—several palaces were already in flames—defined sharply upon the opposite wall the shadows of the unhappy family. How Matinka rejoiced at having relinquished her former sumptuous abode, and retired to the simple frame building she now occupied! For, in the palace nothing escaped the blind fury of the Strelitzes, who

destroyed whatever came in their way. But even under the humble roof which sheltered them, they were not secure from danger. Matinka had locked and bolted the outer doors and fastened the shutters on the ground floor, but ere long she heard a band of rebels approaching the house and yelling with all their might :

“Down with the race of Menshikoff !
Death to the Menshikoff !”

Matinka hurried her children to the yard, placed them in a corner, and piled before them two or three empty barrels and some fire wood. Then she cautiously entered the front room of the ground floor, so as to discover, as far as possible, what was passing outside, that she might be guided as to the best course to pursue. The clamor waxed louder and louder, and she heard the soldiers beating the doors and window-shutters with the butt end of their guns in the evident attempt to force them open. As it seemed no easy matter to obtain an entrance into the house by this means, a soldier fired at one of the windows on the first floor; the ball pierced the blind and whistled close by

Matinka's head. This was followed by a shower of balls, several of which entered the room without, however, wounding the poor woman. Her terror was at its height as several voices amid the crowd cried out:

“Let us burn them out! Bring fire!”

A man sprang forward immediately with a resin torch, and was about to carry the suggestion into effect, when unexpectedly a protector appeared upon the scene in the person of a lieutenant of the Strelitzes. He rushed into the midst of his comrades exclaiming:

“What are you doing here? Can you find no better work to occupy you than pillaging this poor cabin, which is hardly worth ten roubles?”

“Lieutenant,” replied some of the soldiers, “we know what we are about. Menshikoff's family live here and we are resolved to exterminate them.”

“You are mistaken,” said Simonow, who, hearing of her danger, had hastened to save Matinka. “My own sister rented this house after the death of Menshikoff's mother.

We have already sacked the residence of the imperial favorite."

Then approaching the house he called aloud :

" Matinka ! Matinka ! where are you ? why don't you open the door to me ? "

" I am here, Simonow," answered his sister, unclosing the shutters. " I am so grateful to you for coming to my assistance."

" You see that I told the truth," resumed the lieutenant, addressing his comrades. " Now let us go elsewhere ; we shall find more suitable work than destroying the house of my poor sister."

The Strelitzes moved away without making any opposition, and soon disappeared from the street. What fervent thanksgiving Matinka returned to heaven for the preservation of herself and her children from the imminent danger ! But the tragedy being enacted in the streets was not at an end. On the contrary, the tumult became more violent, and the report of fire-arms redoubled with frightful intensity. The regiments which remained faithful to the Czar

had united under the orders of General Gordon. He commanded the rebels to return to their quarters, and on their refusal, he attacked them, making a great slaughter and strewing the streets with the bodies of the dead. The contest was still raging when Matinka heard a gentle knock at her front door. She descended hastily, and inquired in a low voice who was there.

“It is I, sister ; open the door at once,” replied her brother in a faint voice.

She drew back the bolt without delay, but could scarcely control herself on seeing her beloved brother, her protector, pale, covered with blood, and tottering from weakness.

“Let me die here in peace,” he said feebly, as he leaned upon his sister for support, purpling her dress with the blood which flowed from his wound. “All is lost. To be shot or hung, is the fate which awaits me, if my place of retreat be discovered.”

He was scarcely able with the assistance of his sister to ascend the staircase. What anguish to the heart of poor Matinka!

The condition of Simonow required the immediate attendance of a surgeon, and yet she dared not call one in, for fear of betraying the asylum she had offered to her brother. She, therefore, undertook to examine, wash, and dress his wounds herself; a painful task to one who had a horror of the sight of blood, a task however, which her sisterly affection gave her strength to accomplish. The remainder of the night she passed by his bedside, cooling, as well as she could, with simple remedies the burning heat of his fever.

The following morning she impressed upon her children the extreme danger to which the family would be exposed should it unfortunately become known that one of the Strelitzes had found refuge in the house, and she urged upon them the importance of being silent upon the subject to any one whom they might see. The advice was most seasonable, for, two days afterwards, a proclamation was issued declaring that the penalty of exile into Siberia would be rigorously enforced upon all who, knowing the place of concealment of a rebel, would

refrain from denouncing him to the military authorities. Could Matinka obey such a decree? Could she deliver up to certain death her brother, her savior, the savior of her children? No, she would not, even at the risk of her own life. Moreover, she trusted in the influence of her husband at Court to save Simonow. He improved rapidly, and the brother and sister were considering the best means to adopt in order to secure his escape from the capital, when the unexpected return of the Czar to Moscow overthrew all the plans they had devised. A ukase was promulgated, ordering search to be made for the missing Strieltzi.

The news of the horrible revolt which had imbued the streets of the capital with blood, had reached the Czar in England, at the moment when he was about to embark for Italy. On being informed what had occurred, his anger was unbounded, and he determined to judge the guilty without mercy. He first directed that every quarter of the city should be searched. Now, as the neighbors had frequently seen Matin-

ka's brother go in and out of the house, the officers of the law naturally included it among the number of suspected dwellings and, of course, Simonow was discovered. He was made prisoner and carried off under a strong escort. Matinka would have experienced the same fate, had she not been spared by the superior officer out of respect to her husband's name.

The next day she learned that all the chiefs of the Strelitzes had been condemned to death. Wild with grief, she directed her steps towards the Kremlin, or palace of the Czar; she shuddered with horror, as she saw the workmen engaged in erecting gallows on the battlements of the imperial fortress. She had no doubt that sentence had been passed upon her brother, as his wounds were evidence of the part he had taken in the struggle; besides, his rank of lieutenant would exclude him from pardon. She was revolving in her mind what means she could possibly adopt to save him, when a way suddenly suggested itself, but she must, to ensure success, discover if her husband had returned to Moscow with the

Czar. For this purpose, she first went to the palace she had occupied before the departure of Menshikoff. She found it a heap of ruins, and nothing induced her to suppose that he had been there. Disappointed in obtaining the desired information, she turned in another direction, and after a few minutes walk met a band of soldiers escorting a party of Strelitzes loaded with chains. Anxiously casting her eyes over the prisoners, she recognized the unfortunate Simonow. He was extremely pale, but seemed calm and resigned.

“Simonow! my beloved brother!” she exclaimed, advancing towards him with open arms.

“Back! back!” cried out the soldiers, raising the butt-end of their muskets to strike the poor woman, who was obliged to desist from her attempt to reach her brother, and to follow the sad cortege at a short distance.

At this moment it happened that the Emperor himself, accompanied by a numerous suite, turned into the street and advanced towards the escort. This sudden

apparition seemed to Matinka a manifest interference of heaven. Prostrating herself before the Czar, she raised her hands in supplication and cried in a tone of anguish :

“ Great Emperor ! Pardon ! Pardon for my unfortunate brother ! ”

At this unexpected apostrophe, Peter checked his horse, and touched by the agony depicted on the woman's countenance, he asked kindly, “ Who is your brother ? What is the crime for which you sue for pardon ? ”

Encouraged by the gentle manner in which he spoke, Matinka pointed to the group of prisoners and said :

“ He is one of those men who are being led to execution. He is one of the Strelitzes, but he is the best, the most devoted of brothers.”

“ And the most ungrateful of my subjects,” interrupted the Czar, whose face clouded immediately. “ All the Strelitzes are wretches who conspired my death. No pardon for them ; all shall receive the punishment they deserve.”

Having said these words he was about to move on, when Matinka recognized her husband amid the Emperor's suite. The sight of Menshikoff revived the hope which had been extinguished by the positive refusal of the Czar.

"Alexander! my dear husband!" she cried out, "intercede with me, I implore you in favor of my unfortunate brother. He is guilty of no crime. He saved my life and the lives of your children. Unite your supplications with mine, I implore you."

"What!" exclaimed the Emperor, addressing his favorite, "is it possible that your wife is the sister of a rebel?"

Menshikoff at once comprehended that his future hung in the balance and that an acknowledgment of the truth would involve the loss of his master's favor. Unwilling at any cost, to incur so great a disgrace, he allowed worldly considerations to gain the ascendancy over the fear of God.

"My gracious lord and master," he replied with imperturbable effrontery, "her fears for her brother have destroyed the woman's reason. This is the first time I have

ever seen her." Turning to some of the attendants in the suite of the Czar, he ordered them to remove her, and then rode on with the Czar without even casting a glance at poor Matinka, who was thrown insensible upon the sidewalk by the imperial servants.

When she recovered from her swoon, it seemed to her that she was awaking from a horrible dream ; she even asked herself if it might not be that she was mad. What a frightful awakening ! and oh ! what a terrible meeting after so long a separation ! How her heart was crushed, as she recalled the odious conduct of the man for whom she would gladly have sacrificed her life ! With difficulty she dragged herself to her humble dwelling. She endeavored to consider if any means remained untried to effect her brothers release, but her thoughts were so confused she could resolve on nothing. Hope was extinct. God had deprived her of her excellent mother-in-law ; her brother was being led to execution ; perhaps he had already expiated his fault on the gallows. Her husband was forever

lost to her. Of all the ties which bound her to life, none remained but her children, and that firm confidence in the protection of God which never abandons the virtuous.

But a deeper anguish lacerated at that moment the heart of Menshikoff. He had coldly sacrificed the sentiment of honor and duty, his conscience, his wife and his children for the favor of an inconstant man. He had staked all that should have been dear to him for a shadow, a nothing. These reflections forced themselves upon him, when, after leaving the Czar, he retired to his own room. Nervously pacing the floor, and striving in vain to lull the reproaches of conscience, he revolved in his mind his present position. Again and again he asked himself the question, should he persevere in the path he had entered and definitively repudiate his wife, or, abandoning the seductive road of ambition should he return to his original obscurity? Long did he waver in his decision; at last, the spirit of evil conquered. The wretched man determined to break a marriage which would deprive him of the good graces of the Em-

peror, and be an obstacle to his future advancement at court. He had not, however, the courage to execute this odious project himself. Moreover, he feared he might falter in his infamous resolution, were he to have a personal interview with his wife and children. He therefore gave the negotiation with Matinka in charge of his steward, a shrewd and able man.

She was seated with her children, when a knock at the door caused her to start and utter a loud cry. She had not renounced all hope of seeing her husband return to her again. How bitter the disappointment to meet a stranger instead of Menshikoff !

CHAPTER VI.

THE SEPARATION.

HAVING ceremoniously saluted Matinka, the messenger from Menshikoff thus addressed her: "My gracious lord would be justifiable were he to reproach you severely for having, by your inconsiderate conduct this morning, exposed him to extreme danger. But he spares you because of the sufferings you have already endured. By the fact of harboring your brother, one of the chief insurgents, you have incurred the penalty of exile into Siberia. Your husband might have saved you from this punishment, and even preserved the life of your brother, had you not, with unexampled imprudence, enacted a scene in the presence of the irritated Emperor.

Should the Czar now learn that you are really the wife of Menshikoff, and that your

husband deceived him in your regard, the imperial vengeance would fall upon both of you, and your children would be left orphans. To avert from all the danger which manaces you, there is but one means, a means suggested to my master by the deep affection he bears to you and his children."

"What is it?" exclaimed Matinka eagerly.

"My master has directed me to propose it to you," continued the messenger, as though he had not heard the question just put to him. Nothing but an absolute necessity, and the present imminent peril could have forced him to such a decision."

"For the love of heaven and in mercy tell me at once," said Matinka.

"If you consent to employ this means," pursued the steward, dwelling upon each syllable, "you will shield your husband from the just indignation of the Czar, you will save the life of your brother, and you yourself will escape being exiled to Siberia. If you really love your husband, your brother and children, you will not reject the anchor of salvation he holds out to you."

"Certainly I will not," exclaimed Matin-

ka with vehemence, "but tell me the means."

"It is," slowly replied the messenger from Menshikoff, "the dissolution of your marriage with my gracious lord."

On hearing these words, she trembled violently, and covered her face with her hands.

"Choose, Matinka," resumed the steward, "and let me know your decision."

For a few moments she was unable to speak, then she said in a faint voice:

"Is it possible that there remains no other way of securing our safety but the separation of those whose union God has blessed?"

"There is none other. Thus alone can your husband preserve the influence he now possesses and attend to his interests, without exposing himself to suspicion."

"To anything else I will readily consent," said Matinka: "to that, never. Let my husband reduce me to the condition of the most humble slave."

"That is not the point. The question concerns a separation."

"I am ready to retire with my children to

the most remote and obscure corner of the empire," replied the poor woman, weeping. "No one shall know that he is my husband. I will even forbid my children ever to pronounce, in the presence of others, the name of their father. But consent to a separation—never."

"You refuse, then?"

"Yes, sooner would I sacrifice my life."

Very well, your husband leaves you free. Proclaim, if you will, through the streets of Moscow: my husband lied to the Czar! I am the wife of Menshikoff! and you will soon reap the reward of your obstinacy."

"O my God! Tell my husband to do what he thinks right and best. I submit to his will."

"That is precisely what he does not wish. You must, yourself, make the decision, for he is unwilling that you should have cause even to make him the least reproach. If you agree, he will accede to a separation, if you refuse, he will accept with resignation the consequences of the anger of the Czar."

"Does he then require me to condemn

myself to a separation which will be my death?"

"Yes," replied the steward. "The affair rests entirely in your hands. The love he bears you is such that he leaves it to you—the decision of your common fate."

Matinka bowed her head, joined her hands, and prayed in silence. After a few moments she said to the steward, who seemed to be anxiously awaiting her answer:

"I will not allow Menshikoff the opportunity of saying that he loves me more than I love him. To prove my love to him, I would cheerfully die. But I can make a greater sacrifice than my life. For love of him I consent to be separated from him. Let him remain great, rich and happy, whilst I shall be poor and abandoned. Now tell him to look to the rescue of my brother from the hands of justice."

"You have done well," said the artful officer, fully satisfied as to the success of his mission.

"One word more;" added Matinka, pointing to her children. "Will Menshikoff leave

me the only happiness that remains to me on earth?"

"He said nothing positive on that subject," replied the messenger. "Perhaps as there are but the two, an arrangement might be made for you to keep one."

"No, no," exclaimed Matinka. "As well might you cut my heart in two pieces. Both, both, I must have both my children."

"Oh!" answered the steward, "I think he will make no difficulty." Having accomplished his purpose, he retired.

A few days later, on a cold evening in November, 1697, Matinka, accompanied by her two children, walked slowly towards the church of St. Andrew. She entered through a wide door into the temple, the vast nave of which was lighted only by the single lamp suspended before the tabernacle. Pale and exhausted by her short walk, she seated herself near the choir, where, overpowered by grief, she prayed in silence; neither Florent nor Helen ventured to address her.

Shortly afterwards a priest entered the sanctuary and knelt at the foot of the altar. He was a venerable old man, whose white

beard fell upon his chest. As he prayed before the crucifix, the church clock struck nine. Matinka started, glanced hastily around as if dreading some sinister vision, and trembled on hearing a vehicle rolling rapidly to the side door of the church, where it stopped. Next, the heavy tread of a cavalier resounded on the marble flag-stones. A very tall man, enveloped in a large mantle, entered the choir and knelt upon the altar-step. It was Menshikoff. Twice Matinka essayed in vain to rise, and twice she fell back as though suddenly paralyzed. The venerable priest, taking pity on her, supported her to the altar-step beside her husband, who was evidently making an effort to steel himself against any sentiment of compassion. Matinka remained standing with bowed head, not daring even to take the hand of the man she loved so tenderly.

In a solemn voice the priest said :

“What God has joined together, let no man put asunder. Yet our Lord Jesus Christ says that Moses, on account of the hardness of hearts, ordered a decree of di-

vorce to be given to avoid a greater misfortune."

[*Note.*—The priest, in order to authorize divorce, satisfies himself with repeating the very words which condemn it, for, Jesus Christ, after recalling the toleration granted the Jews, immediately adds that he had come to revoke it, and to restore to marriage its primitive purity and indissolubility. Contrary to the morality of the Gospel and the Catholic Church, the Greek schism permits divorce, and not only separates what God has joined together, but it blesses, by a religious ceremony, the separation, as it does the union.]

"Alexander Menshikoff," continued the priest, "are you determined to break the union which you have contracted before God? And are you, Matinka Natuschkin, likewise determined to dissolve it?"

"Yes," answered the Imperial Councillor, in a firm, clear voice.

The affirmative reply of Matinka was as the last sigh of one in her agony.

"In sign of mutual consent take hold of hands," said the priest.

Matinka placed her icy cold hand in the burning, nervous hand of Menshikoff. She trembled so convulsively that Menshikoff appeared touched by it. Had she not cause to tremble, when she reflected that her hand lay in that of her husband for the last time?

"Ten years ago," resumed the priest, "I united you in marriage before this altar. To day I release you from the vow which then bound you. I absolve you from your reciprocal duties, I separate you from each other in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. May you never repent what you have now done. Go in peace."

Menshikoff arose immediately and left the sanctuary. The children sobbed aloud. As their father passed them, he stopped a moment and said gently and affectionately:

"Will you come and live with me?"

"No, no, I will not," exclaimed both children, and rushing to their mother they threw their arms around her and kissed her over and over again.

Menshikoff seemed to hesitate and waver in his resolution, as he contemplated this

touching scene, but in an instant he strode down the church and disappeared through the side-door.

Henceforth no one mentioned the names of Matinka and her children.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PINNACLE OF FORTUNE.

THE ambitious Menshikoff had removed the only obstacle which stood between him and the worldly honors his pride coveted. Preferment came rapidly : in a few years he had become count, prince, prime minister, field marshal. The Emperor bestowed upon him vast domains, with one hundred thousand serfs, and named him Duke of Ingermanland. The Emperor of Germany, the King of Prussia, and other monarchs, lavished dignities upon him in order to conciliate the all-powerful favorite. The immense treasures he received from the generosity of the Czar, he increased still more by unlawful means, for avarice is the root of all vices. He embezzled large sums destined for government expenses, accepting bribes for appointments to office and, more than once, sold himself to

foreign princes, thwarting, in their interest, the political designs of his master. Having amassed great riches, he was able to contract a new alliance with a Russian princess, who bore him a son and two daughters. The powerful Menshikoff was honored and dreaded by all; even the most noble families of the country courted his favor. When he left his magnificent palace in his elegant equipage, gilded and adorned with armorial bearings, and drawn by six superb horses, an armed guard preceded to clear the way. All, from the highest officer to the simple soldier, saluted him with as much respect as if he were the Emperor himself. No one could recognize in the powerful prince the pastry-cook's apprentice, who, but a few years before, had sold pies through the streets of Moscow.

But, alas! the man, in the midst of his grandeur, was not to be envied. All is not gold that glitters. Surrounded by the splendors of a luxury to which few private individuals have attained, he was often the most miserable of men. Over his head was suspended the sword of Damocles.

He knew it, although none suspected the anxiety and remorse which forever gnawed his heart.

He had reached the zenith of his glory; the hour of his humiliation was about to sound.

The Czar had laid the foundations of a new city on the banks of the Neva, purposing to make it the capital of his empire; this city was St. Petersburg. As the land was moist and marshy, it was necessary to drain it and add dry soil. Thousands of men were employed at this work; wagons, carts, and every description of transport was pressed into service for conveying bags of earth even from a great distance. It happened one day that Peter the Great desired to inspect the works. He directed Menshikoff to accompany him to the environs of the new city. Scarcely had they left the precincts of Moscow, when they reached a bridge roughly formed of trunks of trees partly decayed, and dangerous to cross. There were large openings in the logs, and the least deviation of the horses from the straight line, would necessarily have upset

the vehicle and precipitated the Emperor into the marsh over which the bridge was thrown. He had been conversing pleasantly until they neared the dangerous crossing. In a voice of thunder he cried out :

“Halt !”

The horses stopped as still as if their feet had taken root in the ground. Addressing Menshikoff, the Czar said :

“Did I not, rascal, appoint you inspector general of bridges throughout the empire? Look at this one. Is it thus you earn the thousands of roubles I pay you annually? Why do you not attend faithfully to the duties of your office? You are a robber. Descend from the carriage for a moment.”

Saying these words the Emperor sprang lightly to the ground. Menshikoff followed him trembling in every limb. The Czar took his cane, and dealt with it no gentle blows upon the back of his Minister of State. It was a strange spectacle to the curious crowd which had collected around the monarch, to behold that prince, clad in the most simple attire, administering, with his own hand, so severe a castigation to a

great lord superbly dressed, wearing the insignia of many orders, and submitting meekly to the violent correction. When Peter had fatigued his arm, and his anger had cooled, he said affectionately to his favorite :

“ Now, dear Menshikoff, we will continue our journey.”

Both re-entered the carriage, and the Emperor resumed the conversation as pleasantly as though nothing had occurred to interrupt it. As to the Minister of State, he dared not give the least indication of the pain he was suffering. On the contrary, he was obliged to laugh every time the Czar laughed.

Not long after the incident related above, information was given the Emperor of another embezzlement on the part of Menshikoff. The latter, apprised of the fact by the spies whom he employed in the imperial palace, was apprehensive lest serious consequences might result to him from the denunciation to his master of his renewed peculation. But before he could devise a plan to avert the the effects of the Emper-

or's wrath, he received a letter inviting him to dine with the Czar. He turned pale and trembled from fear, and so great was his agitation that he was unable to conceal it from his valet when he presented him his court-dress for the occasion. He sighed as he contemplated the decorations and insignia, the marks of imperial favor ; gladly he would now have exchanged them for the peace of a good conscience. With anxious forebodings he passed the various groups of courtiers, officers, Councillors of State, ministers and ambassadors who were assembled at the palace, and who saluted him respectfully, although the greater part cordially detested him. With a presentiment of the humiliation awaiting him, the homage he rendered the Emperor and Empress was unusually profound. His place at the table was opposite the Czar. The latter appeared serious, but gave no evidence of anger or excitement. Menshikoff had no appetite, and the luxuries spread before him he left untouched. Occasionally, he scanned anxiously the countenance of the Emperor, hoping to read in his expression the thoughts

which occupied his mind. But not a cloud disturbed his serenity. Suddenly the band of music stopped, and the guests, involuntarily ceasing their conversation, turned towards the Czar who, with his habitual calmness, directed one of the attendants to bring from his cabinet a folded paper which he would find on the marble table under the mirror.

Menshikoff comprehended at once that a bitter humiliation was in store for him, and his anguish was indescribable. When the chamberlain returned and presented the paper to his master, the latter said :

“Read the contents aloud, slowly and distinctly.”

Menshikoff trembled from terror upon beholding the angry flash of the Emperor's eye as he imperiously commanded him to rise. Without a word the favorite promptly obeyed, presenting a pitiable image of a criminal before his judge. The chamberlain was equally embarrassed, and glancing suppliantly at Menshikoff as if to beg pardon for what was about to happen, he read in a hesitating manner the following :

"Alexander Menshikoff, the son of a poor peasant, was lifted from his low condition of a pastry-cook's apprentice by the favor of his sovereign, and elevated to the highest dignities of the State. By the eminent qualities with which he was gifted, by his extraordinary acquirements, his indefatigable activity, he conciliated the good will of his Emperor, who lavished upon him wealth and honors. But he has not always corresponded to the just expectations of his master; he has often repaid with the blackest ingratitude the kindness of which he was the object. The enumeration of his unjustifiable and iniquitous acts, would fill a volume. He relies upon the longanimity of his indulgent Emperor, who has already chastised him by making public his peculations; he has again been detected in the embezzlement of the public funds by drawing, for two years, and appropriating to his own use, the pay for a regiment which did not exist."

The chamberlain, having completed the reading, folded the paper and awaited the Czar's orders.

Peter, fixing his eyes sternly upon the

prince, and dwelling upon each syllable as he spoke, said to him :

“ Menshikoff, I have humiliated you, but you have richly deserved punishment. You have long known the penalty I intend to inflict when you are guilty of such misdeeds. I will faithfully keep the promise I made you never to condemn you to death ; but I advise you not to force me, by a renewal of your crime, to reiterate the chastisement of to-day, or to use my cane as I did at the bridge of St. Petersburg.”

Thus terminated this painful scene.

After dinner, the Emperor and all the court repaired to another hall, where tables had been arranged for cards. Menshikoff made one of a party consisting of the Empress and two of her ladies of honor, and he played as though nothing unusual had occurred, although the exterior calm which he maintained, belied the agitation of his soul. Besides, his humiliation was not the only reparation exacted of him. Every day has its morrow, and on the morrow, the imperial favorite received a positive command from the Czar to refund the two hundred

thousand roubles which had been the fruit of his peculation.

In 1725 Peter the Great died, and the Empress Catharine I. succeeded him on the throne of Russia.

This change of sovereigns, far from restricting the power exercised by Menshikoff, only rendered it the more secure. It was through the influence of his favorite that the young Czar had made choice of Catharine, or rather Martha Rabe, for his wife, and encircled her brow, peasant as she was, with the imperial diadem. Under the new administration, Menshikoff's hand was visible in every department, and the reign of his former protégée was, in reality, his own reign. He ruled supreme, and many a one whom he suspected of denouncing him to the Czar Peter was exiled to Siberia. However, this worldly glory was not of long duration. In 1727 the Empress followed her husband to the grave, leaving the throne to her grandson Peter II., a boy of thirteen years of age. Menshikoff, for a moment, thought his rule was at end. But Catharine's will invested him with the regency

during the minority of the Czar, to whom he was also appointed guardian. His pride no longer knew any bounds. He went so far as to aspire to become the father-in-law of his sovereign. He betrothed his elder daughter to the young Peter, and the time was appointed for the marriage.

But the patience of Almighty God had reached its limit, and the moment had come, when his insatiable ambition was to be checked by the voice of Heaven, and he was to hear the words, "So far shalt thou go but no farther."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT.

SHORTLY after the important events recorded above, Menshikoff remembered, after retiring for the night, that he had neglected to transmit an imperial order. He pulled the bell-cord which hung at the head of the bed, in order to summon the attendant whose duty it was to watch in the antechamber. The call was not answered. Again he rang, but no one came. Enraged by the inattention of his subordinate, he sprang from the bed and opened the door leading into the antechamber. A young man engaged in writing a letter was seated at a table with his back to the door, and apparently so absorbed in thought as to have been unconscious of his master's summons.

Like all others whose conscience is not pure, Menshikoff was suspicious. What

could be the nature of the communication, he said to himself, which so entirely engrossed his servant's attention as to render him oblivious of all else? Perhaps he was a spy, making notes for his employers at a time when he supposed the household were buried in sleep. At any rate, he must satisfy himself on that point.

Softly entering the cabinet, he stole on tip-toe behind the young man and looked over his shoulder; but as the first word his eye fell upon was his own name, he exclaimed:

“Hold! what are you doing?”

Terrified as if an infernal voice had struck his ear, the young man arose hastily, and seemed uncertain whether to throw himself at his master's feet or to seek to escape his anger by flight. His lips moved as he endeavored to stammer an excuse, but no sound was audible.

“Scoundrel! I have caught you in the act!” cried Menshikoff, as he seized the paper which he supposed to be the proof of treachery.

He ran his eye rapidly over the sheet,

but as he read, his features relaxed and the angry expression disappeared. In the mean time, the young man having recovered from his emotion calmly awaited the result.

The contents of his letter were as follows:

“MY DEAR MOTHER:

“A long time has passed since you have heard from me, but I beg you not to conclude from my silence that I have forgotten you. Want of time alone has caused my apparent neglect. Fortunately, however, the unavoidable delay gives me the opportunity of sending you good news. I have had the happiness of being admitted among the attendants of the great Prince Menshikoff, of whom you so often spoke to us when we were children. What peculiar emotions I experienced on entering the house of a man so universally honored and so rich! I was somewhat alarmed, having been told that he was haughty, irascible, and unkind. But since I have been in his service, I can say from personal observation that he has been misrepresented. He is not, certainly, an angel from heaven, but he has excellent qualities. So far, I have no cause for serious complaint, and I believe that if his dependants perform their

duty properly, he is not a person who would find fault unjustly. In truth, his palace is daily beset by a crowd of people, great lords, and poor, unfortunate creatures, all tormenting him and soliciting some favor, until it amounts to a persecution. It is not, therefore, astonishing if my master sometimes loses his temper, and storms against the intruders as Samson did against the Philistines. The prince has two charming little girls, beautiful and sweet as angels, and then a son, brave, as the son of such a lord should be, for whom one may, unhesitatingly, predict a brilliant future. I can not say enough in praise of the princess. Twice already, when giving me a rouble for executing a commission, she has called me 'dear Michaelow.' I send you, dear mother, in this letter thirty roubles of silver which I have saved from money received. My master gives me high wages, and to this is added an occasional gift. Besides, I gain another rouble by watching during the night in the prince's antechamber. This is the third night that I have supplied the place of a fellow-servant."

Here Menshikoff had interrupted the young man. He was not in the least offended by the description his servant had

given of him. On the contrary, he was rather flattered by the simple language of a child speaking the sentiments of his heart ; for, at times, he could be noble and generous. He gave the young man the despatch, directing him to present it to the officer on duty, with orders to forward it immediately. He then drew from his purse a handful of gold pieces and said to the astonished attendant,

“Send that to your mother, as she has brought you up so well. So good a son must of necessity be an honest, faithful servant. If you do not permit yourself to be spoiled by others, you need not fear that I shall storm against you as Samson against the Philistines, or the Czar Peter against the Swedes at Pultowa. I am in great want of a man upon whose fidelity I can rely ; for, I am well aware that among my household there are concealed enemies. It is in your power to aid me to discover them and to protect me from their snares. You will, in this manner, be able to testify your gratitude for the favors I am disposed to bestow upon you. Should I sometimes, in the pres-

ence of your companions, scold you or speak harshly, you may be certain that there is nothing serious in my displeasure. And now, good night."

Michaelow fervently thanked his generous master, and he continued to be one of Men-shikoff's most devoted servants. However, he carefully refrained from assuming the odious character of informer, nor did he betray the inconsiderate remarks of his associates, or report their faults. The prince, for his part, apparently paid no attention to him; on the contrary, his indifference was rather marked. If alone with him, he was affectionate in his manner as though to compensate for his neglect in public.

One day, nevertheless, the prince acted towards Michaelow with the most striking injustice. At every turn and without cause, he reviled him, threatened him with the knout and exile to Siberia, and refused to accept any explanation or permit a word to be said in his justification. Michaelow could not comprehend the injustice to which he had been subjected, and overwhelmed by grief, he seated himself in a cor-

ner of the room where the servants of the palace were accustomed to assemble. There, resting his elbows upon the table, and covering his face with his hands, he wept bitterly. Willingly would he have given all the gold he had received from the prince, could he have prevented the painful scene through which he had just passed. Absorbed in his own sorrow, he did not notice that all his companions had retired with the exception of one, named Karpakan, who had always testified to him a more particular attachment. After a few moments of silence, Karpakan said :

“Come, come, Michaelow, try to forget what has just passed. Let us open a bottle of wine ; nothing will so quickly divert the current of your thoughts.”

Saying these words, he placed upon the table a decanter of wine and two glasses, which he filled and drank to the health of his colleague.

“Our master is a singular man,” continued Karpakan. “One is never sure of doing anything to suit him. I can complain as well as you, of the unjust reproofs he has

administered. Nowadays, an upright and loyal heart does not suffice to advance one in the world. Hypocrites and flatterers make their way more quickly and with more facility. What is left to be done? We must howl with the wolves to escape being devoured by them. I must acknowledge that all masters are not of the same stamp as Prince Menshikoff. For instance, there is young Prince Dolgourki. In his establishment, every servant is treated like a prince, although this lord is not so rich as ours. In return for the slightest information as to what passes in the Menshikoff palace, he gives, it is said, a handful of gold pieces. If I knew some little circumstance to communicate, I could make a nice sum of money. It is only necessary to hint through a third individual that you are disposed to gratify his curiosity, and he forthwith slips into your hand several roubles. I confide this to you from pure friendship. But do not speak of it to any one lest there may be too many competitors for the reward."

Michaelow paid very little attention to

the remarks of his companion, but a singular circumstance which occurred a few days later brought them forcibly to mind. His master had given him a letter of importance for one of the high officials of the empire, and he was preparing to execute the order immediately. At the foot of the staircase Karpakan stopped him and asked to see the address on the letter which he held in his hand. Michaelow did not reply, for the strange communication made to him by his companion flashed across his mind.

"If you wish," resumed the latter, "I will go in your place."

This proposition aroused a still stronger suspicion as to his intentions, and Michaelow answered :

"No, no. The prince would have just grounds to reprove me, for I should be acting contrary to his express order."

"Listen to me," insisted Karpakan, lowering his voice. "I promise you on oath, if you will entrust this letter to me for only ten minutes, to give you a rouble for each minute."

"It is useless to talk longer upon the

subject," replied Michaelow. "I see through your intention. You wish to test my honesty and assure yourself if I am faithful to duty."

"Excellent Michaelow!" exclaimed the tempter, "You have nobly sustained the trial to which you were subjected. I can now tell you that our master tries in a similar manner all his servants, and he selects to carry out his designs those who have shown themselves the most worthy of his confidence. I was appointed by him to make proof of your fidelity, and I shall at once inform him that he can trust you without hesitation. Regard your fortune already secured, my dear friend."

Karpakan pronounced these words in an affectionate manner, but as his companion moved on, he stamped his foot and muttered between his teeth:

"The bottle of wine was wasted upon a fool. But no matter, we will see that he receives the reward of his integrity."

Michaelow considered that duty required him to inform the prince of what had passed between himself and Karpakan.

“You have done well, my son,” replied Menshikoff, after hearing the account given by the young man. “Do not mention the circumstance to any one, and banish all anxiety.”

Notwithstanding his master's encouraging words, Michaelow was in a few weeks, exposed to a new ordeal. Four silver candlesticks were missing after a dinner given by the prince to several high officials of the empire. It was impossible for the theft to have been committed by any one not familiar with the interior arrangements of the palace, and suspicion necessarily fell upon those who were in the employ of the prince. The steward was highly indignant, and declared that, cost what it might, the candlesticks should be found. Every room in the palace was searched from the garret to the cellar. They were discovered in Michaelow's bed. The poor young man was so overpowered when informed of the fact that he was unable to stand, but fell as though he had received a heavy blow.

When the prince was made acquainted with the circumstances of the case, he

assembled all his attendants in a hall. Michealow was deeply humiliated as he saw every eye fixed upon him. He was particularly struck by the scoffing expression with which Karpakan regarded him. Menshikoff entered the apartment, and glanced rapidly around until he perceived Karpakan, when giving vent to his anger, he exclaimed in a terrible tone :

“Wretch ! you stole the candlesticks and concealed them in Michaelow’s bed in order to implicate that honest boy, who had refused to become an accomplice in the odious treason you were planning against me. To accomplish your infamous act, you used a false key to enter Michaelow’s room ; it was made for you by the locksmith, Frasikoff, and you now wear it around your neck in a leathern bag. I know all that goes on in my house. I know that you are employed as a spy by my enemies. But traitors receive always the chastisement they deserve, and your punishment shall be equivalent to your crime.”

Then addressing two grooms he said :

“Search that scoundrel.”

Pale as a corpse, and trembling in every limb, Karpakan did not attempt to utter a word in his justification. The false key was found in a leathern bag suspended around his neck, as Menshikoff had said. It was impossible for him to deny his guilt, and he was condemned to be sent immediately to Siberia.

Menshikoff next addressed his attendants in a severe manner :

“Beware of deceiving or betraying me. I know you well ; if I have spared the traitor who still remains among you, let him be assured that it is only to leave him time to fill up the measure of his iniquities, before I deal the blow which justice demands. As to you, Michaelow, to compensate you for the mental suffering you have endured, you shall have the value in money of the four candlesticks. This will also be a recompense for your fidelity.”

The prince had become acquainted in the most natural manner with the circumstances preceding and following the theft. His attention having been called to Karpakan by the revelation of Michaelow, he charged his

spies to watch the movements of his perfidious servant, who was thus detected in his designs.

The scene which they had just witnessed made a deep impression upon the attendants of Menshikoff, who adroitly took advantage of it to confirm them in the idea that he was fully aware of all that transpired in the palace. The unjust suspicion cast upon him also turned to the profit of Michaelow; for, not only was his purse filled with gold pieces by the generosity of his master, but he also received many proofs of affection from him; in return, he loved him daily more and more.

Many hard things are said about Menshikoff, he thought within himself. It may be that all his actions are not strictly conformable to the principles of justice, but after all, it is not my place to constitute myself the judge of my master. My duty is to be faithful to him, and that I am determined to be, so long as he retains me in his service.

The amount equivalent to the value of the candlesticks had just been sent him by the steward, when a boy informed him that a

woman and a young girl had asked to see him, and were waiting at the door of the palace.

"Humph!" grumbled Michaelow, "my acquaintances in St. Petersburg are not so numerous that I should have visitors inquiring for me."

However, he descended and found in the hall a woman and young girl, both dressed in the costume usually worn by the peasantry of the environs of Moscow.

As soon as his eye rested upon them, he exclaimed in a transport of joy: "O my dear mother," and embraced her and his sister with all the tenderness and affection of a devoted son and brother.

"What miracle has brought me this happiness?" he asked.

"The miracle was performed by yourself," replied Matinka. "We thought we could not better employ a part of the roubles you bestow upon us, than by coming to St. Petersburg to see you, and visit the new city of which we have heard so frequently."

"You have done well, dear mother," answered the happy son. "But I shall defray

the expenses of the journey. For, you must know," he added, making the gold coin ring in his pocket, "that I have enough money to pay it ten times over."

"My child," said the mother, "to see you possessed of so much, is a cause of anxiety to me. Your master must be very wealthy, if he gives such wages to his servants as to enable them all to lay aside the amount you can save."

Michaelow tranquillized her by relating the story of the four candlesticks. The good woman appeared touched by the generosity of the prince, wiped away the tears which filled her eyes, and said :

"Ah ! if he is good to you, how could he have been so harsh towards"

Here she stopped, as though influenced by fear in giving utterance to her thoughts.

"You mean," added her son, "towards others often in much higher position. But we will not speak of that, as it does not concern us."

"You do not understand me, my son. But tell me how does he conduct himself in regard to his wife and children?"

"In the kindest manner. Their every wish is gratified."

The mother sighed and cast down her eyes in order to conceal her tears.

"Could we see him at a distance," she continued, "without being seen by him?"

"Oh! There would be no difficulty whatever in that. The antechamber is filled every day with a crowd of people who await the prince in order to present petitions as he passes. On such occasions he rarely notices any one, and you can see him as near as you choose.

"Dear Florent," said Helen eagerly.

The mother, hearing her pronounce her brother's real name, hastily interrupted her, reminding her to be prudent.

"Indeed," resumed Helen laughing, "I forgot that your name here was Michaelow. And yet Florent is not the synonyme of criminal. Still, as our mother here wishes it, I will try for the present to call you Michaelow. Could we, dear brother, be admitted to the apartment of the prince? I would so much like to have an idea of the home of so great a personage."

“I think I can gratify you, but it must be upon a day when the prince does not dine at home. I will ask permission of the steward for your entrance. I am sure he will not refuse me.”

As Michaelow said these words, a splendid vehicle drove rapidly by them and entered the gate of the palace.

As soon as it appeared the young man removed his cap and said :

“It is the prince. I am obliged to leave you now, as my duty requires me to be in attendance on his lordship ; but I shall be free at four o’clock. Where shall I find you ?”

The mother heard not a word her son said. As the carriage approached, she turned deathly pale, and followed it with her eyes until it disappeared beyond the gate. Helen answered the question of her brother, who hastily bade them adieu and re-entered the palace.

The prince had evidently obtained some new favor ; for he was in high spirits when Michaelow helped him to change his court-dress.

"Michælow," he said to him, "I saw you just now engaged in conversation with a very pretty young girl. I was almost afraid you would forget to attend upon me."

"You need never fear, my lord," replied Michaelow, respectfully, "that I would forget my duty, although I was overjoyed to see my mother and sister, who came unexpectedly to St. Petersburg to visit me."

"I can readily understand your happiness," said Menshikoff. Does your mother live near here?" "No, my lord; she lives in the vicinity of Moscow, at the little village of Semesnouski."

The prince changed color, became pensive, and was silent for a few moments. Then he resumed: "In what manner do you intend to amuse your mother and sister during their stay in the capital?"

"Their greatest desire is to see your Highness, and then . . . if your Highness will permit it, the interior of the palace."

"Certainly," answered Menshikoff, flattered by the request. Their wish is easily gratified, and as I dine out with the prin-

ess and the children, you may give them that pleasure to-day. During our absence, you may conduct your mother and sister through all the apartments, and do not neglect to direct the cook to prepare dinner for your visitors, whom you must not send away fasting."

Touched by the kindness of his master, Michaelow kissed his hand to testify his gratitude, and as soon as the family had departed, he hastened to notify his mother and Helen that they could go at once to the palace.

Matinka, however, seemed more occupied by her own thoughts than by all the luxury which surrounded her.

"Oh!" exclaimed Helen, on entering a hall, "how polished and shining the floor is! It is as beautiful as a piece of furniture."

"Yes," said the mother, "as smooth as the tongues of great lords. One easily trips upon them."

"I acknowledge," answered Michaelow, "that I was very uneasy the first time I trod upon the floor. I trembled like a leaf

when I was obliged to place a dish upon the table. Suppose I should fall! I said to myself. But now I laugh at my former fears."

"Just like the great lords who laugh at the dangers by which they are encompassed," observed Matinka.

"Look, mother," cried Helen, "at that immense mirror!"

And placing herself before it, she regarded her image with complacency.

"Ah! why cannot men see reflected in the mirror their defects and vices also!" murmured Matinka, shaking her head.

"Why, mother," said Michaelow, "you seem wholly unlike yourself. Instead of admiring the beautiful things around you you look sad and melancholy."

"You might naturally imagine, my son, that my words were inspired by envy. May God preserve me from such a vice!"

"Mother," resumed Michaelow, leading her to a mantle, "is not that a magnificent clock? Many kings have none to compare with it. The figure of the man holding in one hand an hour-glass, and in the other a

scythe, represents the god of Time. He is said to have eaten his own children because of a prediction that his son would dethrone him. The prediction, however, was verified; for, his wife having given birth to a son, concealed him, and presented to her husband, instead of the new-born child, a stone, which he swallowed without perceiving the fraud. But when the son grew up, he precipitated his old father from the throne of heaven and took possession of it himself. It is thus that pagan history relates the event. The wings on the old man's shoulders denote the rapid flight of time; and the scythe indicates that he cuts men off in the midst of their earthly career, as the reaper mows the grain in the field."

"A fine history of the pagan gods!" exclaimed Matinka, almost angrily. "A father devouring his children! I am no longer astonished to see a father discarding his wife and children when they prove an obstacle to his ambition and cupidity. A mother would be incapable of such an act. And then the unnatural son does not hesitate to maltreat his blind old father.

Blind? A god blind! No, no, tell me no more such stories. How good is the God whom we adore in comparison with those whose crimes you have just related! He is not blind, and He can never be deceived, although hypocrites try to persuade themselves to the contrary. And how good is the Son of our God! Instead of dethroning his Father, he leaves his throne in heaven, takes the form of man, and dies in submission to His divine Father and through love of man. I am astonished, however, that great personages can tolerate in their apartments such an image, which necessarily must remind them of their approaching end. They generally tremble at the mere mention of death, and the angel of death, who is a consolation to those in an humble condition like ourselves, is to them a frightful spectre."

"Mother," interrupted Michaelow, "I see you are out of sorts to-day. Come with me and I will show you something which will charm you."

The door he threw open gave access to a room magnificently furnished. As they

crossed the threshold they were dazzled by the sight of a superb full length portrait in an elegant broad gold frame. It was the portrait of Menshikoff.

"It is himself!" exclaimed Matinka, hastily approaching the portrait. "It is himself, somewhat older than formerly, but a perfect resemblance!"

"Do you know the prince?" asked Michaelow in surprise. "I thought you had never seen him."

"Child," replied the mother in a tremulous voice, "you do not understand. Your own father was just such a man, only he did not wear such decorations and chains around his neck, and he looked more cheerful and affectionate. What a striking likeness. Helen, do you not think that Michaelow resembles the prince?"

"The thought this moment occurred to me," said Helen.

Matinka continued looking first at the picture and then at her son, comparing them in her own mind. Tears filled her eyes, and at last she said with emotion:

"It is many years since you departed

from us. At least I hope you are happy now ; once you were an excellent husband, a devoted father ! ”

“ How can you doubt it, mother ? ” said the children. “ Certainly he is in heaven where there is incomparably more happiness than on earth. ”

The mother sighed, and was so riveted to the spot by the portrait, that Michaelow could with difficulty induce her to pass into another room.

“ This is the cabinet, ” he said, as he introduced the two into an apartment furnished with equal magnificence. “ There is the prince’s *escritoire*, and this is his arm-chair. ”

“ My children, ” said the mother with a sad smile, “ you will be amused to hear me say I would like very much to know how one feels when seated in such a chair as the prince’s. Michaelow, could I sit in it for a moment ? To tell the truth, I am almost exhausted by the fatigue of walking and standing for such a length of time. I will be careful not to crease the superb covering. ”

“Certainly, sit down, mother,” replied the son. “The prince will never notice it. When he is seated there, his mind is occupied by more important affairs.”

Matinka took her seat, closed her eyes and leaned her head against the cushioned back.

“Mother, what is the matter? How pale you are!” exclaimed Michaelow in alarm, as he perceived a deathlike palor overspread her face.

“Oh! nothing,” answered Matinka, opening her eyes and smiling. “On the contrary, I feel well here, and so happy that it would be sweet to die.”

Placing her hand on the arm of the chair and gently stroking the velvet, she continued:

“I suppose your master’s hand has often rested upon this spot. What happiness to me to lay mine on it likewise! I have now one more desire. It would be an extreme gratification to me to carry away with me a trifle, a mere nothing; it would be a precious souvenir to me, provided it had been used by the prince.”

To please his mother, Michaelow glanced around, hoping to find some small article of which he would be at liberty to dispose.

Taking an old pen of no further use from an inkstand, he handed it to her, saying :

“The prince has often had this in his hand, and I can take it without scruple. I must acknowledge, however, that his Highness often sets more value on the most insignificant objects than upon articles of great price. For example, his crosses, his diamonds, jewels and other costly decorations are under my charge. But among the boxes containing all these valuables, there is an old leathern case which he opens only on certain days, and draws from it a small silver ring ; this he holds in his hand and contemplates for a long time ; then he himself replaces it in the case, never permitting any one else to touch it. It was by mere accident that I had a chance to examine it one day, when he was summoned to go without delay to the imperial apartments, and he was forced to permit me to return it to its case.”

“A silver ring ! A leathern case !” ex-

claimed the mother, glancing with evident emotion at the ring she wore on her finger.

"Yes," replied Michaelow, noticing the movement of his mother, "a ring exactly like the one you wear."

Matinka turned quickly towards the window in order to conceal her feelings. Overjoyed, she pressed her hands upon her heart, and said to herself :

"Then my Alexander has not altogether forgotten his Matinka !"

"And here," continued her son, as he opened another door, "is his Highness' bedroom. See the silver basins, the rich carpets and crystal vases. The princess has her apartments with her daughters' rooms near hers; I would like to show them to you, as well as the other parts of the palace, but as they are contiguous to the wing which is occupied by the young emperor, there are always so many passing and re-passing that you would find it disagreeable. The young emperor dwells under the same roof as his future father-in-law, in order to be nearer his betrothed and the prince, from whom he does not like to be absent for an

instant. Now that you have seen the home of his Highness, come and partake of the excellent dinner which he directed should be prepared for you. We will drink to his health and to-morrow morning, if you station yourself in the antechamber, you can see him as he passes."

"No, no," replied the mother, "I will not do that. The prince might speak to us, and on no consideration would I be willing for that."

"But what harm would that do you?" asked Michaelow.

"Never, never!" said Matinka with vehemence. "Let us leave the palace immediately; the prince might surprise us here, and for all the world I would not meet him."

Michaelow, ignorant of the real motive of his mother's determination, urged her to remain, telling her that her fears were groundless; but Matinka, in spite of the representations of her son, refused to yield to his entreaties. She scarcely touched the dinner which was served for them, and regained her tranquillity only after entering

the modest dwelling in which she had taken lodgings upon her arrival at St. Petersburg.

Having spent four days in the capital, she set out for a small town in Siberia, where her brother held an inferior office under government. On taking a tearful leave of her son she recommended him to remain faithful to his master. Michaelow wept bitterly on parting with his mother and sister, and accompanied them with his best wishes on the long journey they were about to undertake.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FALL.

MENSHIKOFF had filled up the measure of his evil deeds, and the hour of his chastisement was at hand. His elevation from obscurity to the highest offices of the empire, his immense wealth, and the favor of the Czar had excited the envy of some. His arrogance, his oppressive government, and the abuse of the power entrusted to him by his sovereign, inspired others with a bitter hatred. Nearly all at court were his enemies, and for a long time they had been secretly plotting his downfall. One among them, Prince Dolgoruki, having obtained the post of chamberlain, succeeded in insinuating himself in the good graces of the Emperor so as to become indispensable to him. This officer, by degrees and with consummate art, undermined the influence of

Menshikoff. A recent peculation of the insatiable regent furnished the opportunity of ruining him and hurling him from his high position. The sovereign, having granted to his sister a large sum of money, directed Menshikoff to forward it to its destination; but the latter boldly appropriated the whole amount which had been committed to his charge. Dolgoruki, informed of the embezzlement by his spies, communicated the affair to the Czar, and by artful and perfidious suggestions inflamed his anger to the highest pitch. Menshikoff had no suspicion of the storm which was about to burst over his head. One morning on going according to his daily custom to offer his homage to the Czar, he was startled to find the imperial apartments entirely deserted. Not a courtier, not the most inferior officer, not even a servant, was to be seen. Terrified, and filled with the apprehension of some overwhelming misfortune, he dispatched a messenger to inquire what had become of the Czar, and whither he had gone. To his extreme vexation he was informed that the Emperor had departed

stealthily from the dwelling of his tutor, and without leaving a word of explanation as to the cause of his conduct, had established himself in his own palace. This news was a thunderbolt to the prince. He comprehended at once whence the blow came and saw clearly it was the work of his enemies. His first thought, therefore, was to make every effort to frustrate their plans and regain the favor of his sovereign. For this purpose he drove immediately to the imperial palace; but in a short time the carriage of the prince was seen to return. He alighted from it as pale as a corpse, and he had scarcely the strength to ascend the staircase. Rage and grief were depicted upon his countenance. The Czar had refused to admit him, had not received his future father-in-law, the father of his affianced bride!

On seeing the condition of the prince, his wife and children gathered around him, anxiously inquiring the cause of his trouble.

"O my poor child!" he exclaimed, regarding with commiseration his elder daugh-

ter, "to what a harsh man you are betrothed."

After a few moments he continued :

"Leave me, my dear wife, go, my children ; I wish to be alone to collect my thoughts and review our present situation."

Burning with fever and agitated by a thousand contending feelings, he paced the floor of his apartment. A half hour had thus passed when an imperial dispatch was handed him. He tore it open and ran his eye rapidly over the contents. How little was he prepared for the outrage done him ! The Czar announced to him that he was deprived of all his dignities and offices, that he was no longer permitted to remain in the capital, which he must quit that very day, and repair to the castle of Oranienbaum, the place assigned for his future residence.

Stunned by the unexpected blow, he remained for a while motionless and as if insensible. Springing from the chair upon which he had fallen, he trampled under foot the Emperor's letter, and in an outburst of anger exclaimed :

“And this is the reason the herd of courtiers and flatterers regarded me so insolently and defiantly as I passed through their midst ! Why was I so blind as not to have observed in time the fall of the barometer of court favor ? What ! I governed the state to the satisfaction of a Peter the Great and a Catherine, and I am of no account in the eyes of a youth thirteen years old ! What ! A public humiliation ! Is this the recompense for thirty years of toil, devotion and sacrifice ? I have crawled on the ground ; my heart has often been lacerated ; I have labored, watched, trembled, flattered ; I have been a hypocrite ; I have acted contrary to the law of God by casting off a devoted wife and children who were dear to me. All this have I done ; and a heedless boy under my guardianship destroys in an instant the fruit of the work of my whole life. No, that shall never be, never !”

He pulled the bell rope violently.

“Go notify the Lieutenant-Colonel of my regiment that I wish to see him immediately with all his officers,” was the order

given the servant who responded to the call.

The princess, who overheard the directions of her husband, rushed into the apartment.

"In the name of Heaven what are you about to do?" she exclaimed in an agony of fear.

"I am going to maintain and defend the rights of my daughter," replied Menshikoff vehemently. "Emperor as he is, he has no right to treat the daughter of a prince as if she were a peasant."

"Oh! my dear Alexander, your anger leads you astray. You will draw down misfortunes of every kind upon our heads. Renounce all such projects, I conjure you."

"What!" cried Menshikoff, still more infuriated by the opposition of his wife, "am I not Commander-in-chief of the Russian forces? Three hundred thousand men obey my orders, and at their head I can brave the anger of my ward."

"They were once under your command," pursued the princess, "but the same hand which made you their chief, has withdrawn

from you the dignity. Your rebellion might cost us all our lives."

Menshikoff saw at once the truth of the remark, and controlling by degrees his violent emotion, he was able to meet with a sad but calm countenance, the officers whom he had summoned to his presence. He thus addressed them :

"My faithful companions-in-arms, you perhaps already know the heavy blow which has been dealt me. I have been deprived of all my offices and dignities. I desired, before retiring to the place of exile which has been assigned me, to see once more those who have ever testified for me so great an affection and so loyal an attachment. Receive my last adieu, with the assurance that I shall always cherish for you a grateful and tender remembrance. The sword I wear was the inestimable gift of the late Emperor, and I cannot better dispose of it, than by leaving it in the hands of valiant men. Accept it in testimony of my gratitude."

As he spoke, he detached from his cincture the magnificent sword studded with diamonds and precious stones, handed it to

the Lieutenant-Colonel, and embraced him with emotion.

All the officers were deeply moved. They drew their swords from the scabbards and swore to remain faithful to their chief, and to defend his rights even at the peril of their lives.

"General," they exclaimed, "place yourself at our head, lead the way, and we will follow wherever you may go."

"No, my friends," replied Menshikoff, "I will never permit so many brave and noble men to risk their lives for an old man who is weary of the world and its trials. I therefore bid you adieu, exhorting you to preserve towards the Emperor the fidelity you owe him; forget Alexander Menshikoff, who departs to complete, in shame and humiliation, the career which has hitherto been so brilliant."

The officers reluctantly yielded to his wishes. All these men, who had distinguished themselves on many a battle-field, wept like children as they took leave of their ancient chief, who embraced them with the affection of a father.

The trying scene was over and Menshikoff, exhausted by emotion and the control he had been forced to retain over his feelings, threw himself on a chair.

"Are you pleased with what I have done?" he asked of his wife, who joined him as soon as she knew he was alone.

"You have shown yourself to be truly great," she replied. "You have just gained the most difficult of all victories—the victory over self. From this moment you belong entirely to your family; henceforth, you are free from the harassing cares which have wholly occupied you. Oh, how happy we shall be! There still remain to you vast possessions, a large fortune, your wife and children. You have made Russia great, powerful and prosperous; and now after a brilliant career, you descend voluntarily from the theatre of your glory."

The princess thus sought to console her husband, but the calmness he exhibited was only exterior. Wounded pride and disappointed ambition tortured his heart. To rebel against his fate, however, was of no avail. He must, of necessity, depart im-

mediately. He therefore gave orders to prepare everything requisite for the comfort of the family in their new establishment of Oranienbaum. Every servant in the palace was at work. Bales, boxes, trunks, bags, were placed upon a long line of wagons, carts and carriages which were to accompany Menshikoff and his family. A large crowd collected early in the morning around the gate of the palace, awaiting with impatience the moment when the prince and the imperial ex-betrothed should appear. Many loudly complained that this man, who had drained the people of their hard earnings, should be permitted to take away with him so many valuable articles. Others suggested the propriety of stoning him, and added, that, of all his wealth, nothing ought to be allowed him but the basket in which he had formerly carried his French pies. The reproaches and insults increased when Menshikoff, dressed in a simple suit of coarse cloth, divested of all the decorations indicative of the honors which had been lavished upon him, issued from the palace gate and entered the carriage. The princess

was more calm and self-possessed. Her two daughters covered their faces with their handkerchiefs, and the boy looked angrily and defiantly at the crowd. Several vehicles, filled with the servants of the palace, followed that of the prince.

"Does not that seem," said one among the throng witnessing the scene, "the train accompanying a king on a journey rather than that of a criminal sent into exile?"

The sentiment thus openly expressed was re-echoed by the crowd, and many a threat was muttered between their clenched teeth.

Menshikoff was keenly sensitive to the contempt so publicly expressed, and said bitterly to his wife :

"Is it credible that those are the very people to whom I distributed bread and wood only a few days ago, and who showered blessings upon me for my liberality?"

"It is ever thus with the world," replied the princess. "Even the best of men are the sport of the inconstancy of others. Think of the Saviour himself. On his entry

into Jerusalem, the people cast their garments at his feet, strewed the way with branches of palm and shouted Hosannas ; only a few days had passed, when they demanded his blood with loud cries and nailed Him to a cross. If the Christ is thus treated, what can you expect ? ”

The princess endeavored by these words to console her husband ; but they were ineffectual to restore peace to his soul, conscious, as he was, that the humiliations and affronts heaped upon him were the merited chastisement of his own evil deeds.

The carriage conveying into exile the man, who but the day before was the most powerful prince in Russia, passed by the chief military guard of the capital. With what promptitude, an hour before his fall, the officers and soldiers would have put themselves under arms, to render the homage due a field-marshal of the empire ! Now how all was changed by the mere order of a child ! The officers on duty continued their walk with folded arms, carelessly glancing at their former superior, or, even pointedly turning their backs. The

sentinel stood quietly with his gun resting on his foot, and some of the soldiers burst into an insolent laugh.

Similar humiliations awaited the fallen family as long as they were within the capital, and ceased only when they had reached the open country.

“Courage! my dear Alexander,” said the princess, seeing her husband silent and dejected. “Courage! Oranienbaum is not so disagreeable an abode. It is even pleasanter than St. Petersburg. There we shall be in the midst of a charming country; we shall enjoy delightful walks together in the fine weather, and we will relieve the tedium of the long winter by our home pleasures, reading, conversation and music.”

“Yes, papa,” added one of the daughters, “Alexander plays on the flute, I play on the piano, and Nina sings. We shall have enough to amuse us.”

“Before dinner,” said his son, “we shall fence, shall we not, dear father? After dinner, we can play at billiards; and in the evening, you will relate to us your travels

and tell us of the battles you fought under Peter the Great."

"In the winter," continued the former betrothed of the young Czar, "we will take sleigh drives or skate on the castle ponds."

"We can also cultivate flowers in the winter within the castle," said the mother.

CHAPTER X.

THE EXILE.

SUDDENLY, without their knowing the cause, the carriage conveying Menshikoff and his family stopped. The prince put his head out of the window to inquire of the coachman the reason of the halt, when he heard repeated cries of "Stop, stop!" and he saw an officer galloping at full speed holding a letter elevated above his head and calling aloud, "Stop, stop!"

What could this mean? Had the Emperor repented of his harshness? Did the letter bring him a full pardon? Did it contain an order for the prince to return to St. Petersburg and resume all his dignities? A child as young as Peter the Second is so changeable. From what other motive could an imperial courier have been dispatched with a letter to the princely family? All

these thoughts passed rapidly through the minds of Menshikoff, his wife and children, and enkindled in their souls the hope of a change in their lot. They gave no expression to their feelings, but the joy imprinted upon their countenances was sufficient evidence of their anticipation of a reversal of the decree of exile which had been pronounced against them.

In the mean time the courier had reached the carriage. He unfolded the missive and read it aloud to Menshikoff. But far from being a ukase remitting the penalty to which the prince had been condemned, the letter enumerated all the peculations and misdemeanors of which he had been guilty, and which rendered him, for the future, wholly unworthy of the confidence of the Czar. Overwhelming as were the facts summed up and laid to his charge, he still flattered himself that the Emperor would have mercy on his former minister and pardon him. What a thunderbolt for him was the conclusion of the document!

"All these crimes having been proved, we, Peter the Second, Czar of all the

Russias, decree in our justice that all the possessions of the said Menshikoff be confiscated, and that he, with all his family, be exiled to Siberia for life."

As the officer terminated the reading of the imperial order, the prince fell back in the carriage and covered his face with his hands. The princess seemed as though deprived of consciousness; the son, pale as a corpse, gazed immovable upon the officer. The two young princesses alone were able to solace their woes by tears.

On learning what had passed, all the attendants alighted from the vehicles they occupied, and with loud lamentations surrounded the Menshikoff family, who, in their intense sorrow, had no words of consolation for others.

At this moment the whole line of equipages, wagons and carts altered the direction they had hitherto followed and took the road towards the north.

"Do you intend to accompany our master to Siberia?" asked the servants of each other.

"I have not the least desire to do so,"

answered a footman. "They say that the winds there are ten times colder than at St. Petersburg. Besides there is no way of amusing one's self. There are plenty of bears, wolves and other wild beasts which make the country very unsafe. As to parties and balls, which make time pass so pleasantly, they are not to be looked for in Siberia. And in future, you may well imagine, the kitchen of the prince will not be sumptuously provided; on the contrary, abstinence will be observed in his household."

"You are right," said another; "for our master by one stroke has become as poor as a church-mouse. You may be sure that he will have barely sufficient to support life. Of course he will not need so many servants, whose wages he will be unable to pay. I have decided to take my leave."

"I am of your opinion," added a third; "I shall follow your example."

A moment afterwards, the officer having ordered the Cossacks, who had thus far escorted Menshikoff, to take charge of the baggage which he considered unsuitable to

the prince and convey it to St. Petersburg, all the servants determined to return with them, thus abandoning a master who had hitherto paid them generously. Michaelow alone remained at his post behind the carriage of the prince. In vain his companions endeavored to shake his fidelity; he did not even reply to their entreaties. They reviled and insulted him, but he remained firm in his decision, compassionating in his heart his master when he should learn that he had been left alone in his misfortunes.

The carriage stopped at a small village to change horses, when Menshikoff called his chief valet. Michaelow presented himself and inquired what he wished.

"Collect all my servants," said the prince. "On no account would I have them share my hard lot and accompany me to Siberia. I desire to dismiss them and keep with me only those who are absolutely necessary."

Michaelow was much embarrassed and hardly knew what to reply. At last gaining courage, and seeking to excuse the ingrati-

tude of which the attendants had given evident proof, he said :

My lord, they foresaw what would happen, and they returned to St. Petersburg ; they left secretly for fear of renewing the suffering of your Highness."

Menshikoff could hardly believe his ears. He looked out of the carriage and found that all the vehicles had disappeared. He smiled sarcastically and said to his wife :

"See how delicately they have acted ; these people who protested so strongly their devotion to us, wished to spare us pain and for this reason they stole away without a word of adieu."

Then addressing Michaelow he said :

"Why do you persist in remaining here ? Go, join your comrades."

"I will never abandon your Highness," answered the faithful boy.

"Begone," resumed Menshikoff, "I never wish to see you again. You are all hypocrites, mercenary time-servers, faithful only to a well-filled purse. Begone, I tell you ; you have nothing more to gain in my ser-

vice. Seek Dolgoruki; he is rich and I am poor."

"I will remain with your Highness," replied Michaelow.

"Have I fallen so low," exclaimed the prince, wringing his hands, "that the lowest of my servants refuses to obey my commands?"

Fixing his eyes, flashing with anger, upon the poor young man, he said :

"Make off with yourself as soon as possible, and never again appear in my presence !"

Witnesses of this scene, the princess and her children cast a look of compassion upon Michaelow, who retired, but did not withdraw to a distance, resuming his accustomed place behind the carriage.

The party soon continued their journey. The country became more and more deserted as they advanced, and the north wind was more piercing. The family, absorbed in the thought of their misfortunes, preserved a profound silence. Michaelow prayed for them. As night came on, they heard in the distance the howling of hungry

wolves. Every instant the cold increased in intensity. The occupants of the carriage wrapped themselves up as warmly as they could and vainly endeavored to sleep. How long the night appeared to them! It seemed as though day would never dawn. In the morning, the wind became more violent, and the Menshikoff family shook with the cold. Moreover, having eaten nothing since they had left St. Petersburg, they began to feel the effect of their abstinence. They therefore stopped at a village inn for breakfast. The prince was obliged himself to let down the steps of the carriage and alight without the assistance of a servant. Trifling as was the vexation, it appeared to annoy him. Performing the office of footman, he awkwardly aided the princess to alight. The young prince did not wait for ceremonies but leaped from the carriage; he fell, however, heavily to the ground, for his limbs were stiff from having remained twenty hours in the same position. As to the young princesses, they were so benumbed by the cold that they could scarcely

stand. Michaelow had disappeared, to the great disappointment of the mother and daughters, who had cherished the hope that his fidelity would stand the test to which it had been subjected.

The family staggered towards the door of the humble inn ; but no sooner had they entered the low apartment, than their first impulse was to seek again the open air, so stifling was the heat, so suffocating the smoke with which the room was filled ; but the intense cold without compelled them to endure the impure atmosphere. Sorrowful and humiliated they seated themselves on the wooden chairs which were presented them. Menshikoff fixed his eyes upon the ground with an expression of despair. The warm nourishment they so much needed, was furnished them by the host in the form of a kind of black broth made of rye flour and served in an earthenware tureen. Not one had the courage to taste it, so disgustingly unclean was the man as well as the plates and spoons.

“There must be some tea and chocolate,” observed one of the young prin-

cesses, "in the baggage they saw fit to leave us. But where shall we look for them?"

The young prince immediately began the search, and succeeded in finding the packages they wished. But a new difficulty arose. Who was to prepare the chocolate and tea? They could not rely upon the hostess, who rivalled her husband in want of cleanliness, and who, besides, had never seen tea or chocolate. The young girls decided to try, with the aid of their brother, to fill the office of cook. If the poor children had not been objects of pity on account of the miserable condition to which they were reduced, an observer would have laughed heartily at their awkward attempts, as they were both entirely ignorant of cooking. How unskillfully they handled the utensils! How often they burned their fingers! What stains of soot on their faces and dresses! If a little while before they had shivered from the cold, now how overheated they were, bending over the large fire! Great was their anxiety to acquit themselves creditably of the work they

had undertaken! At last they considered the chocolate ready to be served, and they removed it from the fire; on tasting it they found it too thin. The woman of the house, who had been watching the young girls and laughing to herself at their awkward attempts, perceiving their dilemma, offered them a cup of flour and a wooden spoon. One of them threw in a handful of the flour while her brother took the spoon to stir the chocolate. Unfortunately in his eagerness to aid his sisters, he overturned the vessel and the contents were spilled. The tea remained; but it was so filled with the coals and cinders which had been scattered by the upsetting of the chocolate, that the taste was detestable. The two princesses wept with vexation on seeing how entirely they had failed in their efforts.

Just as the unskilled cooks entered the room in tears to show to their parents the pot of bitter, blackened tea, another door opened, and Michaelow, who they thought had abandoned them the evening before, appeared. He carried a waiter upon

which was a pot of smoking chocolate, cups and saucers, and a pile of tempting cakes. It was an unexpected apparition to the poor family. How clean were the cups! How fragrant the chocolate! How fully at that moment they appreciated the value of a good servant! Generally, their worth is not properly estimated until their services are withdrawn. Had Menshikoff, in his perplexity, been able to offer fifty crowns for a cup of chocolate properly prepared, he could not have procured it without the assistance of Michaelow. He would have been forced to do without it. For his part, Michaelow could not have adopted a more efficacious means of being restored to the favor of his master, embittered by misfortune, than to surprise him by presenting opportunely a breakfast, for which he had provided by searching the baggage during the night. Having thus obtained the necessary utensils with flour and chocolate, he had received permission from a neighboring peasant to use the fire of his cabin, and he had succeeded in his new office far better than the young princesses.

The hopes he had entertained were realized.

“ Good and faithful Michaelow ! ” exclaimed the family, transported with joy.

Menshikoff did not speak, but he cast a grateful look upon the good young man, who was happy in the conviction that he had regained the good graces of the prince. With what appetite the hungry family partook of the warm drink and the delicious cakes served by Michaelow !

Poverty often humbles pride, and disposes the great of this world to draw near their inferiors and recognize in them their neighbor. Such was the effect of the assistance rendered the princely family in their necessities by their valet. The princess insisted upon his taking a cup of chocolate which one of her daughters herself presented him ; but he refused to accept the unaccustomed favor. The young prince had always been extremely haughty in his bearing toward his father’s domestic ; now he seemed anxious to compensate for his former manner, by assuming a kind and affectionate tone when addressing the trusty boy.

After a short time allowed them for repose, Menshikoff with his family was obliged to resume the journey. Not a word passed his lips; he was unable to shake off the gloom which had settled upon him after receiving from the Emperor the sentence of exile. His wife and children anticipated with anxiety the sad fate awaiting them, and sadly contrasted with it their recent brilliant position. Although the body of the carriage was hung on excellent springs and was protected by thick glass, the difficulties of the road became more and more intolerable.

For several days and nights the exiles were allowed to halt only long enough to change horses. On reaching a small village they were, however, permitted to rest for one night. But what new privations they experienced! There were no down beds, no silk coverlids, no attendants. The rooms they occupied were unclean, the furniture coarse, the beds icy cold. Michaelow threw himself on a bundle of straw, where he slept the deep sleep given by a good conscience.

Menshikoff did not close his eyes. How bitterly he reproached himself ! For was it not through his fault alone that his family was overwhelmed by misfortune ? The children slept tranquilly. Not so the mother. She arose in the morning more fatigued and prostrated than on retiring the night before. She was extremely pale, her eyes were without lustre, and the cold seemed to have penetrated her whole system. Hitherto, upon the least derangement of the health of any member of the family, the physician residing at the palace was summoned to administer remedies, and all the resources of his art were employed to relieve the sufferer. Now in this isolated village, the princess was deprived of all means of combating the illness by which she was attacked. The physician had departed with the other attendants of Menshikoff, even carrying away with him the box containing the medicines. Michaelow did the little in his power by preparing some hot tea for the princess and placing a vessel of hot water to her feet.

At the dawn of day the exiles were com-

pelled to continue their journey. At last they approached the confines of Europe, and Siberia lay extended before them. Vaster in extent than the entire continent of Europe with its numerous states, empires, kingdoms and republics, this solitude contains a very small number of inhabitants. In these immense, rough and barren steppes, there are to be found only a few scattered habitations, and the village of Berezov, which had been assigned as the residence of Menshikoff was some distance in the interior of this desert. A long journey was still before him ere he could reach his allotted place of exile.

The princess grew worse daily. The children forgot their own misery in their solicitude about their mother. To their other privations was added want of clothing. Their dresses had been torn and rubbed until they were in tatters. They had not only no change, but nothing to protect them against the increasing cold. Fortunately the care of providing them with warm clothing devolved upon the commander at the frontier town.

He was a rough man, unaccustomed to treat with courtesy the exiles who were temporarily under his charge. He notified the Menshikoff family that they would be required to lay aside their present style of dress and substitute for it garments which, whilst being better suited to the rigorous climate of the country, formed a kind of uniform, enabling the government to recognize its prisoners. As he was speaking a soldier entered, bearing on his shoulders an enormous bundle of wearing apparel made of coarse brown cloth. When he threw it on the ground the commandant turned it over with his foot, pushed on one side a pair of wide breeches with a loose frock, and said to the prince:

“Menshikoff, take those, and I wish you good health whilst wearing them.”

Then addressing the princess, he added:

“Woman, those are for you and your girls. And you,” he said to the young prince, “can take the rest.”

In this coarse manner did he speak to the man whose favor was earnestly sought a few days before, by the highest lords of the

empire. Without a word in reply Menshikoff picked up the garments, unfolded, and was apparently examining them. In reality, he was striving to conceal from his wife and children the tears which filled his eyes. They left him and retired to an apartment pointed out to them to assume their new dress. When they reappeared they could no longer be recognized as the same persons. The princess would have been taken for a peasant woman, and her daughters for village girls. Their small feet, accustomed only to satin or velvet slippers, were now covered with heavy boots lined with felt; the long sleeves of the thick and coarse cloth falling over their hands, almost prevented their use, whilst the shapeless head-dress nearly concealed their faces. Gloves of fox-skin were suspended from their shoulders by a hempen cord. By special privilege they were allowed to keep their body linen to protect them from the contact of the rough clothing. On returning to the room where they had left Menshikoff and his son, the princess and her daughters found them apparently transformed into peasants.

"Tell me," said the princess cheerfully to her husband, "how you like my dress?"

Her daughters, for fear of paining their father, concealed their real feelings under an assumed gayety, and said to him playfully:

"Father, we are going to a masquerade ball. Have we not disguised ourselves admirably? I hardly think we shall be recognized."

But as Menshikoff gazed upon his wife and children, saw them so metamorphosed, and yet so cheerfully adapting themselves to their changed condition, his heart seemed ready to burst. Had they overwhelmed him with reproaches, had they accused him of being the author of their misery, he would have suffered far less anguish than was inflicted upon him by their uncomplaining endurance of the wrong he had done them. The woman before him so miserably attired, and almost dying from fatigue and exposure, still smiled upon him affectionately; his children, so recently ranking the highest among the élite of the Russian aristocracy, and

now so humbled by his fault, showed him the same respect and love as though their miseries were the result of unavoidable misfortune. He could no longer control the grief and sorrow which he had until then pent up in his own soul. Falling on his knees before the princess, he sobbed aloud, unable to articulate a single word. His wife and children on beholding him so deeply afflicted, mingled their tears with his, and even Michaelow could not restrain his emotion.

“Ah!” exclaimed the young prince, “if the Emperor were to witness the desolation caused by his anger, he would have pity and pardon us.”

“My child,” replied his mother, “we must place our confidence in God and not in man; in the Sovereign of the universe and not in the kings of the earth. Hitherto we have relied upon human aid. Let us now repair the past and turn our hearts to the God whom we have neglected, and who is so rich in mercy, so abundant in His benedictions.”

“Ah! Woe to me!” exclaimed Menshi-

koff, recovering himself sufficiently to speak. "By my rapacity and insatiable ambition I have brought all this misery upon my family."

"Calm yourself, my dear Alexander," replied the princess. "We will bear our common misfortunes cheerfully, and thus the burden will seem lighter. Besides, if affliction draws us nearer to God, we have gained by the exchange. In reality life is but a short dream, a passing drama, in which we are at one moment at the pinnacle of grandeur, and in the next, in the depth of misery. As for myself, I feel that my pilgrimage here below is near its term, and my heart sighs for that true country, where sorrow enters not, and where eternal happiness is our portion."

Already a man from the street had rudely called to the exiles that it was time for them to leave, but wholly absorbed in their sorrow, the order had not been heard. Michaelow, therefore, profited by the first pause to address the prince and said to him:

"Pardon me, your Highness, but the commandant"

These words startled Menshikoff as if from a dream, and he exclaimed angrily:

"What do you mean, miscreant? Do you mock us in our misfortunes? You are the most elevated of the party; there is no Highness here; only a family of exiles."

"My lord" stammered Michaelow in confusion.

"You are the only lord here," again interrupted Menshikoff, frowning, "for you can go where you please, whilst we are condemned prisoners."

The princess took pity on the poor boy in whom she daily became more interested.

"In future, Michaelow," she said gently, "call my husband father, address me as your mother, and give to my children the name of brother and sister. Your unswerving fidelity has acquired you the right of being considered by all as a member of the family."

Before he could express his gratitude for the kindness of the princess, the commandant knocked loudly and impatiently against the window, exclaiming roughly:

"Be off with yourselves at once. We are

not disposed to freeze out here to allow you the time to chat at leisure."

The unfortunate exiles obeyed the summons without delay. On opening the door they found that their carriage had been replaced by six small wooden sleds, called by the Russians kibitkis. They were open, drawn by one horse, and capable of containing only one person besides the driver. They were, in a word, extremely uncomfortable vehicles, consisting of an oblong box, in which was placed a wooden bench as a seat for the traveller, and as they were uncovered, they offered no protection against the inclement weather. As he saw these miserable kibitkis collected before the door, Menshikoff stood as if petrified and could scarcely believe his eyes.

"And must my poor, sick wife make the remainder of the journey in those rough boxes?" he asked.

"Certainly," replied the commandant, with an insulting laugh. "Menshikoff, perhaps, imagines that the government is disposed to furnish him with a travelling carriage superior to that allowed the other

exiles. Did you procure comfortable vehicles for those unfortunate creatures, whom your inhumanity banished to Siberia when you were in power? Eh?"

These words fell like a thunderbolt upon Menshikoff; they were as a revelation to him, making him realize that every crime must be expiated. He had, in cold blood and with one stroke of his pen, exiled hundreds of men to Siberia. He had remained deaf to the supplications of the wives and children, who were either separated from those so dear to them, or who, innocent as they were, had been condemned to share the fate of the exiled husband and father. All, without regard to their social position, were subjected to the same treatment; the high-born princess, delicately nurtured and accustomed to all the refinements of life, had, equally with the meanest peasant, been forced to wear garments similar to those now presented to Menshikoff and his family; the same sleds had conveyed them to their place of exile. Now his turn had come.

"My God!" he said to himself, "just and right are Thy judgments!" And

gently pressing his wife's hand, he seemed to ask her pardon for drawing her down into such a depth of misery.

His heart was crushed with sorrow when he saw his children, who had been brought up in the midst of luxuries, place themselves without a murmur in the miserable vehicle provided for them. He made every exertion to procure, at least for his wife, a less uncomfortable seat than the wooden bench fastened in the sled, but he could obtain only a bundle of straw to throw over it. Michaelow, seeing her shivering with the cold, placed his own cloak around her shoulders. Menshikoff thanked him for his generosity by a silent pressure of the hand. The sad cortege set out, the children in front followed by their mother; then came Menshikoff, and lastly Michaelow. The drivers cracked their whips, and the kibitkis glided over the snow with the rapidity of lightning.

The first time they stopped to feed the horses, Menshikoff leaped from his sled and hastened to the kibitki conveying his wife.

"How are you?" he inquired in intense anxiety.

"Very well," she replied, drawing her wrappings as closely as possible around her.

"Will you take something to eat or drink?"

"Thank you, I am neither hungry nor thirsty."

"Will you not alight for a moment? The motion may help to heat you."

"No, I am not cold. I have warm wrappings."

"Give me your hand," he said, passing his over the side of the sled.

"I cannot remove my mitten," she answered.

"No, do not take it off," replied Menshikoff, as he gently took her hand enveloped in the thick fur. "But," he exclaimed affrighted, "it is stiff and frozen, and you are as pale as death."

"Your fears make you exaggerate," she said, forcing a smile. "Do not be anxious."

Menshikoff, however, could not dismiss his fears, and it was with an agonizing heart that he obeyed the summons of the driver to resume his seat in the sled. He passed the first day in the most poignant grief, but

the night augmented his sufferings. The wind blew more violently over the icy plain they were traversing and became more piercingly cold. A fine snow fell, and as the flakes were driven against the faces of the travellers, they pricked their cheeks like so many needle points. The cold penetrated until their bodies seemed to have become converted into masses of ice. If Menshikoff himself, hardened as he had been by the fatigues of so many campaigns, suffered intensely, it may well be imagined that his invalid wife and delicate children were more sensitive to their present hardships. This martyrdom lasted an entire night, during which time their journey continued without a single halt. Thus far, they had been travelling by moonlight, which was rendered brighter by the reflection from the snow. Now the moon disappeared, a thick fog overspread the plain, and the sun at last emerged from it like a ball of fire, diffusing the light without the warmth of day.

The party changed horses several times on the second day; Menshikoff and his

children took advantage of the momentary halt to approach the sled of the princess. Sometimes they found her sleeping, or if sufficiently aroused to answer their inquiries, she did so at random, apparently without comprehending their meaning. Tortured as they were by anxiety on her account, they had no means to alleviate her suffering, and the second night found them still speeding on the way over the ice-covered plains.

The heavens, however, assumed a new aspect. The sky, towards the north, was at first illumined by a pale, dim light which, by degrees, extended around the horizon, and changed to a bright red, as though it were the reflection of an immense fire. This luminous arch was constantly changing. Now at one extremity, now at another, again in the centre, rays of light streamed upwards like tongues of fire and flitted from side to side, continually varying in brilliancy, color and magnitude. A ray at one moment just visible above the horizon, in the next, would shoot upward in a pyramid of flame, would suddenly die

away, and as suddenly, flash to the zenith in brilliant coruscations.

This magnificent auroral display, frequent and beautiful in the polar regions, rendered the horses so restive that the drivers were obliged to halt for awhile. The princess was roused from sleep, she sat upright upon the bench of kikitki, and dropped from her shoulders the cloak which Michaelow had thrown around her. The red light from the sky glowed upon her cheeks. She fixed her eyes upon the heavens, and not noticing her husband and children, she said as if to herself :

“The sun and moon shall lose their light. The stars shall fall from heaven. Listen,” she exclaimed, raising her voice, “how all the people of the earth howl because they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds in power and majesty.”

A prolonged howl was really heard in the distance, but it was the cry of wolves which, startled by the strange light turning the darkness into day were fleeing to the solitude of the steppes.

Menshikoff listened with anxious emotion

to the words of his wife. Was she dreaming, or had reason deserted her?

“Do you not hear,” she resumed after a short silence, “do you not hear the sound of the trumpets blown by the angels of the Lord to collect the elect from the four quarters of heaven?”

“My dear wife,” said the terrified prince, “be calm. What you behold is only an aurora borealis, a phenomenon very common in these regions.”

But her husband's words had no effect upon the princess. Her eyes wandered over her family who surrounded her.

“Do you not see,” she continued, extending her hand towards the sky, “that Christ is seated above judging the living and the dead, placing the just on his right hand and the wicked on his left? O Lord! admit me, I beseech Thee, among the number of the elect, and open to me the door of Thy heaven where it is warm; I am cold, cold and frozen. Reject me not; cast me not into the exterior darkness where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

It would be impossible to describe the

anguish of the unfortunate family, who could no longer conceal from themselves the imminent danger threatening the princess. With tears streaming from his eyes, Menshikoff swept the horizon at a glance, in the vain hope of discovering some shelter where the poor invalid might repose, or die tranquilly.

"How long will it take us to reach Tobolsk?" he inquired of the officer commanding the escort.

"We could arrive there by daybreak," he replied, touched by the condition of the princess.

"Push forward then as rapidly as possible," said Menshikoff, "or it will be too late."

The patient permitted the cloak to be again placed around her shoulders, and the horses were urged on to their utmost speed. Towards daybreak, Tobolsk, the capital of Siberia, appeared in the distance, sharply defined against the horizon, where the anxious travellers had been impatiently watching for it. This city, which at that period was only an insignificant village, seemed to

the prince a haven of safety. No sooner had they reached the outskirts, than he alighted from his sled and implored the officer-in-command to permit him to seek for his wife a room comfortably warmed. Having obtained the permission he was about to make the necessary inquiries, when Michaelow approached his master and informed him that he had an uncle living at Tobolsk, that in all probability, his mother and sister were now in the village also, and that they would gladly receive the princess.

"Find out the residence of your uncle at once," said Menshikoff. "Life or death may hang upon a moment of time."

The arrival of the sleds had thrown the whole village into commotion. Isolated in a measure from the rest of the world, the slightest circumstance interrupting the monotony of their lives was to the inhabitants an event of importance. As soon as the report was circulated that the newcomers were a party of exiles, a crowd of people impelled by curiosity collected to gaze upon them. Michaelow, addressing

one among them, inquired for the residence of the military intendant, Simonow Natuschkin.

"Yonder it is, at the corner of the street," replied the man whom he had interrogated.

"Stop," said a boy, "there is the niece of Natuschkin, standing before the door."

"Ah, it is my beloved sister!" exclaimed Michaelow, overjoyed.

He ran at full speed towards Helen who, frightened by the unexpected appearance of her brother, nearly fainted. Having tenderly embraced her, Michaelow said:

"Go to our mother and tell her to prepare as quickly as possible a warm bed for a lady who is dangerously ill."

"But," exclaimed Helen, "tell me how it happens that you are here so unexpectedly and in company with a sick lady? Are you no longer in the service of the prince?"

"Do not question me now, dear sister, I beg you," replied the young man. "Later you shall know all. The patient is the princess, the wife of my master. Go at once and do what I have requested."

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHALICE OF SORROWS.

SHAKING her head as if scarcely admitting the possibility of the statement made by her brother, Helen hastened to relate to her mother what had just taken place. Matinka and Simonow were equally astonished.

Our young readers are, of course, aware that the mother of Michaelow and Helen was the first wife of Menshikoff, so cruelly repudiated by him in opposition to the law of God. Deprived of all resources and with two children to support, she had managed to maintain herself and them by the labor of her hands. She had brought them up in the fear of God and in the practice of every virtue. In order to spare them bitter regret and to preserve them from discontent and envy, she regarded it as a duty to

conceal from them the painful events which had occurred during their early childhood ; consequently, she resumed her family name of Natuschkin, and without informing them that their father was the most noted and powerful man in the empire, she led them to believe that he had died in the west of Europe whither he had been called upon business. And yet she had never ceased to love her husband devotedly, and although living so far from the capital where he resided, she took part in all his joys and sorrows and received with deep interest any news concerning him.

As her children grew older, and she reflected upon the future career of her son, the idea came to her mind to obtain for him, if possible, the position of valet to the prince, that he might be enabled to protect his father from the numerous snares laid for him by his enemies. To succeed the better in her design, she endeavored to inspire her children with an affection and reverence for Menshikoff, frequently spoke to them of all he had done for the prosperity of Russia, and at the same time expressed regret that

such men were rarely served by attendants upon whom they could rely with confidence. Thus prepared for the position his mother wished him to fill, Florent decided to seek admission among the servants of the prince, having at his mother's request assumed the name of Michaelow, and given her a solemn promise never to speak of his family to his fellow-servants. He secured the situation she so ardently desired for him, and it was through him she was made acquainted with all that transpired in the palace of the great personage whom she had married in early life.

After the expiration of twenty years, Matinka, who had always longed to see her husband again, impelled by an irresistible desire to meet him once more, undertook with her daughter the journey to St. Petersburg. We have already followed her in her visit to the home of the man who occupied the highest place in Russia, attainable by a subject.

From St. Petersburg she went to pass some time with her brother, Simonow. The generous sacrifice of his sister had saved his

life, but it did not preserve him from exile. He was transported to Siberia without, however, being held as a prisoner. He retained his rank of lieutenant, and was assigned to a regiment garrisoned at Tobolsk. Having risen by promotion to a higher grade, he was finally appointed to the lucrative office of military intendant of the province.

Simonow warmly welcomed his sister and niece, but he always spoke in the most bitter terms of Menshikoff, whom he had never forgiven for the cruel repudiation of his good and pious wife. Matinka, therefore, carefully avoided mentioning that Florent was in the service of the prince.

But she could no longer conceal the fact when Helen delivered the message sent by Michaelow; for she did not consider herself at liberty to admit the princess in her brother's house without his consent.

Simonow was amazed at the communication made by his sister.

"What!" he exclaimed, in unspeakable astonishment, "you wish to harbor, to take care of the woman who has been your worst

enemy, who has supplanted you, won from you the heart of your husband ! It shall not be ! Never will I consent, were it only to spare you the humiliation. For myself, I pardon Menshikoff for my banishment to Siberia. Apart from the intense cold, I find myself very pleasantly situated. But you, dear sister, the slight he has put upon you can never be forgotten."

"Dear brother," replied Matinka, "how is it possible that the princess can be my worst enemy, when she has never seen me, perhaps has never heard my name? You do not know how many beautiful traits of character Florent ascribes to her. Well would it be, if all hearts were like hers. But even had she wronged me, persecuted me, do you not remember that our religion commands us to forgive our enemies, to pity those who hate us, to pray for those who prosecute us? Should we not imitate our Saviour, who from the gibbet of the cross, prayed for his executioners? Do we not say to God every day: 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us?' No, no, dear brother, I cannot

believe that you are speaking seriously. Let us then, at once, prepare to give shelter to a poor invalid. I only beg you not to betray who I am by an unguarded word. God will bestow upon me the strength necessary to support the trial imposed upon me by charity."

At these words of his pious sister, Simonow felt ashamed of his revengeful feelings and in a more subdued tone he said :

"I cannot understand how it happens that the princess comes to Tobolsk at this season of the year. Who knows? Perhaps the wheel of fortune has turned and brought misfortune upon Menshikoff, as he himself has been the cause of the misfortunes of so many others. I must inquire."

He left the house and approached the exiled family just in time to witness a scene calculated to rouse the indignation of the hardest heart. Menshikoff, aided by his son and Michaelow, had lifted the princess in his arms and they were about to carry her inside the dwelling. The two young princesses followed weeping. At that moment a man, wearing a prisoner's garb like

Menshikoff's made his way through the crowd, gazed an instant fixedly upon the prince, then breaking out in a loud and insulting laugh, he exclaimed with ferocious joy :

" Ah ! ah ! It is yourself, great Prince Menshikoff ! Scoundrel ! hangman ! monster ! So, the justice of God has, at last, fallen upon you ! You have come with your worthy brood to share the fate to which you condemned us ! You are welcome here ! And you, lovely princesses, we welcome you likewise to Siberia ! "

As he said these words, the wretch spat in the faces of the young girls.

Menshikoff had watched every movement of the unknown scoffer. On beholding the insult offered his innocent children, he could scarcely refrain from rushing upon the unfeeling miscreant ; he was restrained by the fear that Michaelow and his son might not have the strength to bear their precious burden were his aid withdrawn. He was beside himself with rage. His eyes flashed fire and his heart was full to bursting. But his hands were not free, and he could only

protect his trembling daughters by an indignant outbreak of passion.

“Stop, wretch!” he cried, in thunder tones. “It is cowardly to insult children when you know that their father cannot defend them. You are aiming at me through them, and I promise you that you shall have cause to repent of your scoffs.”

Tears of rage rolled down his cheeks as he spoke.

The bystanders, touched by the anguish and natural exasperation of the unfortunate father, interfered and forced the man to desist from the outrages he was heaping on the two young girls, and after a conflict with him they obliged him to retire. Even Simonow shared the feelings of indignation which animated the other spectators of this outrageous scene, and he said within himself :

“Matinka is right : revenge is detestable ; it is displeasing to God and revolting to man.” Addressing the prince kindly and cordially, he said :

“Unfortunate father, enter my house and consider it as your own. My children,” he

added, turning to the young princesses, "dismiss your fears; no other inhabitant of Tobolsk would be guilty of such unkind treatment as you have received from that man. You are welcome in my home."

The reader will readily comprehend the effect produced by these words upon the humiliated Menshikoff, who turning towards Simonow, said in a voice choked by his tears:

"May God bless you, good and noble man!"

The princess was carried into Simonow's house and placed in a warm bed. She gave no sign of life except an occasional convulsive movement of the limbs. Her half-open eyes were fixed and motionless. The physician called in by Simonow, pronounced her in a critical condition. To restore natural action to the skin, he ordered her to be sponged with vinegar, and he directed the thick blankets in which she was enveloped to be kept warm by hot bricks and cans of boiling water. Menshikoff watched his wife with the deepest anxiety, and the children gave vent to their sorrow in tears.

“Oh, my God!” said Michaelow’s mother to herself, “how devotedly he loves the princess! He has not a thought for his poor Matinka!”

Although blinded by her tears, she was indefatigable in her attentions to the patient, but whilst lavishing every care upon her, her eyes wandered constantly to Menshikoff, and rested upon him whenever she thought herself unobserved.

Night was coming on before the remedies seemed to have any effect. Then for the first time, a slight color tinged the temples, indicating, as they supposed, an improvement in her condition. But when her face was, at first, bedewed with moisture, and then her whole body bathed in a copious perspiration, the joy of Menshikoff, and his children was unbounded.

“Thank God!” exclaimed the prince, to the physician who entered the room at that moment, “a change has taken place for the better. The worst is now over. She is perspiring freely.”

The doctor looked incredulous, as he approached the bed to verify the truth of

the statement. He placed his hand on the brow of the princess and felt her pulse. Anxiously and impatiently the family awaited the decision which would confirm the hopes they cherished, or dash their sweet expectations. Wavering between fear and hope, they gazed earnestly into the face of him upon whose lips seemed to hang the sentence of life or death.

"The present crisis is not favorable," he said. "The skin no longer performs its functions properly; the sweat is icy cold; it is the sweat of death."

This unexpected announcement converted the joyous hopes of the family into the deepest sorrow. They sobbed aloud. Men-shikoff fell on his knees by the bedside of his dying wife and covered his face with his hands. The features of the princess were contracted convulsively, her mouth was alternately opened and forcibly compressed.

Recovering consciousness she murmured, in a feeble voice, "Alexander! my husband!" and extended her hand to him. He shuddered as he clasped it in his; it so strangely brought to mind the icy coldness

of the hand Matinka had laid on his at the moment when he separated from her in the church of St. Andrew. The conviction forced itself upon him that expiation is a justice, and that every evil deed meets its chastisement.

"My children!" said the mother, in a hardly audible voice.

The young prince and his sisters knelt by their father's side and embraced the hand of their mother whose face was suddenly illumined by a smile of ineffable joy.

In the mean time, a priest had been called in to prepare the soul of the princess for its passage from life to eternity. Having administered the sacraments, he signed her with the sign of the cross, saying:

"Enter into the joy of heaven!"

She made an effort to speak, but the words died on her lips and her head fell back. Her soul had appeared before God. Menshikoff arose; the tears streamed from his eyes; bowing his head, he said:

"My God! Thou art just. To-day Thou smitest me for the crime I committed in

banishing Matinka from my house. Ah! Matinka is avenged."

On hearing these words, Matinka could scarcely command her feelings, and was near falling to the ground. Strengthening herself however to approach Menshikoff, she said to him:

"Have no fear; Matinka has long since pardoned you."

"Can that be possible?" replied the prince, as though his mind were wandering and he did not comprehend the words.

Returning to the corpse of his wife, he contemplated her in silence.

Matinka said nothing more; she thought Menshikoff would recognize her, but seeing herself mistaken, she concluded that he no longer had any affection for her, and though his lips had pronounced her name, it was only because the recollection of her had, by chance, occurred to his mind. She continued, nevertheless, to give all the aid in her power to the bereaved family in the preparations necessary for the burial; these were rendered particularly sad by the circumstances attending them. The ground was

frozen so hard by the intense cold, that no instrument made the least impression upon it until it was softened by building fires on the spot destined for the grave ; and even then, it yielded with difficulty and after great labor on the part of the workmen. What a commentary upon the instability of human grandeur and the uncertainty of earthly happiness, was the funeral of the princess ! A few weeks before, she was mistress of more than a hundred thousand serfs, and possessed a fortune of many millions of roubles ; now, shrouded in the coarse garments of a condemned prisoner, her mortal remains were deposited in a rough wooden box, and her husband and children, in the garb prescribed for exiles, followed her with a few faithful friends to the cemetery. All hearts were touched as they laid her in the grave, and the frozen clods of earth fell heavily on the planks composing her coffin, forever separating her on earth from those who loved her so devotedly. A huge, rough block of stone was, by great exertion, placed over the grave as a monument to mark the spot where a

princess lay, awaiting the final summons. No epitaph was inscribed upon the rude memorial of the high-born exile. Earth's grandeur had escaped her grasp before death deprived her of them, and the tears of her sorrowing family replaced the pageantry with which wealth surrounds the corpses of the great.

The day after the burial, Menshikoff bade adieu to the hospitable Simonow and his sister. He spoke little and kept his eyes cast down, oppressed by a keen sense of his present humiliation. Matinka longed to make herself known to him, and Simonow advised her to do so, but she replied to her brother :

“ This is not a suitable time. His mind is absorbed by the thought of the excellent woman whom he has just lost. One is not so easily consoled for the death of a beloved wife, of a companion who has been as devoted in adversity as in prosperity. Although mine was the first claim upon him, his affection might not so quickly revive, and were he to be cold to me, I should be far more unhappy than I am now whilst he

is ignorant of my presence. My destiny is to suffer, and to suffer in silence."

Matinka embraced with maternal tenderness the children of Menshikoff, when on parting they gratefully thanked her for the attentions she had lavished on their mother. She also considered it her duty to reveal to Florent the secret of his birth ere he accompanied his father to Berezov. The knowledge was an additional incentive to him to continue his devoted care of the exile. By the order of the princess, he had for some time addressed Menshikoff by the name of father; but after he became aware of his real relation to the prince, his manner by degrees assumed a greater tenderness and evinced a deeper affection. Menshikoff could not fail to notice the change, but he ascribed it to the sympathy excited by his misfortunes. Suffering had softened the disposition of the young prince and subdued his pride, and touched by the disinterested devotion of Michaelow, he united with his sisters in testifying his gratitude as far as possible, and thenceforth he was treated as a member of the family.

Simonow and his sister provided the travellers not only with such provisions and articles as would be necessary for their comfort, during the remainder of the journey, but also with such as might be useful to them on their arrival at the place of their exile. After leaving Tobolsk, they made no halt even during the night, but advanced rapidly towards the north. The cold increased in intensity, and the days became shorter. The sun remained only a few hours above the horizon, appearing shorn of its brilliancy, and hanging like a red disk amid the heavy fog. All nature seemed dead, the gloom was broken only by the occasional passage of a traveller in a kibitki drawn by dogs or reindeer, which, gliding swiftly by them, soon disappeared in the mist that shrouded the land.

CHAPTER XII.

THE END.

IT was midwinter when the exiles reached Berezov, their future residence. It seemed miraculous that they had made the journey at that season and had escaped having their limbs frozen. Berezov hardly deserved to be called a town; it was, in reality, only an assemblage of frame houses, low and gloomy, and scattered over an extended plain, the miserable inhabitants of which might, from time to time, be seen enveloped in fur, making their way through the snow to carry comfort, as far as they could, to other companions in misery.

Menshikoff and his family were harshly received by the commandant of Berezov, who assigned as their residence a log cabin, consisting of only two rooms. One was really a mere passage way containing a fire-

place. The other was to serve as sitting-room and bedroom. The larger portion of this apartment was occupied by a furnace constructed of brick, the top of which was intended to serve as a bed, for the inhabitants of this hut. A wooden bench and a rough table constituted all the furniture. The planks forming the walls were not planed. Two or three small openings admitted a dim light through panes of glass so coarse as to be only semi-transparent. Even at mid-day they were obliged to use a taper burned in tallow, or a resin torch. What a painful contrast to the splendor formerly surrounding them ! The whole family were forced to occupy the same apartment ; a few bear skins protected them from the cold at night, and the most indispensable articles for the table and kitchen would have been wanting to them but for the generous foresight of Michaelow's mother and uncle.

The Emperor, it is true, had assigned ten roubles a day for the support of the prince and his family, and the commandant of Berezov was directed to pay him the

amount. But of what use was money in a place where there was scarcely a workman and not even a baker? The summer season was so short in that latitude, that it was impossible to till the ground. Grain was conveyed thither from a great distance, and each family was obliged to lay in a provision of flour during the summer for winter use and to bake their own bread. It was useless to purchase beer or wine, as the exiles could not store them in a manner to prevent them from freezing. To obtain water fit for drinking or cooking, they melted ice or snow over the fire. Apart from this, brandy was the only drink they could procure ; their food consisted of bread, dried fish, or the flesh of the bear or reindeer, and even for this they paid a high price. As to vegetables or other supplies, there was no means of obtaining them at Berezov except during the short summer season, when the Obi is navigable and opens communication with Tobolsk.

Fortunately for the Menshikoff family, Simonow had provided them with supplies for the first winter. Michaelow was the

first to rise in the morning, and he lighted the fire before commencing any other work. He had taken the precaution to buy wood the very day of their arrival, which, aided by the young prince, he had split ready for use. As soon as the fire was thoroughly kindled, he filled the kettle with pieces of ice and boiled the water with which to make bread soup. In the mean time, the princesses had risen and cut the bread. After a short prayer, the exiles partook of the frugal repast. On Sunday, they allowed themselves the luxury of a cup of tea or chocolate in place of the bread soup. After breakfast, Michaelow, accompanied by the young prince, sallied forth over the plains in pursuit of some wild animal in order to furnish meat for their dinner, whilst the two young girls cleaned the rooms and mended the clothing of the family.

As to Menshikoff, he remained immovable, seated upon the wooden bench. Sometimes the tears fell from his eyes when he contemplated his daughters working without relaxation, hardly able to pierce with their needles the thick garments which needed re-

pairing, and fatiguing their eyes in the faint light which pervaded the apartment.

After an absence of a few hours, the young men would return, their frozen breath covering their hair and fur caps with silver threads. They would bring back dried fish and sometimes foxes, martens or ermines. How joyously the two girls welcomed them ! With what pleasure they listened to the account of the expedition which Michaelow and the young prince never failed to relate ! The father alone took no part in the conversation, never uttered a word. Docile as a child, he seated himself at table when told that dinner was served. During the repast he rarely broke the silence in which he seemed to find comfort. Occasionally after dinner, the girls went, accompanied by their brothers, to take a short walk. On their return they invariably found their father on his knees absorbed in prayer. On entering the passage, they could hear him asking pardon of God for the sins of which he had been guilty, humiliating himself before the Sovereign Judge and imploring blessings on his poor children. His sobs could be heard

through the partition of the room and they would have excited the compassion of the hardest heart.

His long continued and unabated grief at last seriously alarmed the exiles. His strength visibly failed and he took no care to preserve his health.

When his son, Alexander, with the view of changing the current of his father's thoughts and furnishing some diversion during the long winter evenings, would ask him some question in regard to his travels or campaigns, he invariably replied :

“ My son, spare me the recital of the faults I committed. Could I live over again my life, I would employ it in a manner more conducive to my salvation and your well being.

On one subject only did he converse willingly, and that was of death and eternity.

Thus the winter passed, and now the days began to lengthen. The atmosphere, warmed by the sun's rays, by degrees melted the snow covering the plains and the ice on the rivers. Blades of grass sprang from

the dark soil and soon the earth was carpeted with a beautiful green. The brown branches of the birch tree budded, and were radiant with their spring foliage. The thaw broke the thick ice covering the surfaces of the Obi and Irtish, enormous blocks of which floated to the sea. The revival of nature produced a beneficent effect upon the inhabitants, who after having been so many months shut up in their smoky cabins, poured out into the plain as though their hearts had, like the inanimate objects around them, imbibed a warmth which aroused in them a sentiment almost akin to joy.

Even Menshikoff was not insensible to the awakening of the world of nature, nor could he resist the incessant entreaties of his children to accompany them in an occasional ramble. One fine evening in summer, they were walking together along the banks of the Obi. Taking advantage of the long days of those latitudes, where the sun hardly sinks below the horizon, the inhabitants of the city were occupied with extraordinary activity in storing food for the

coming year. A large number of boats were descending the river, and the joyous songs of the sailors broke the silence which had so long reigned over that sombre region. Rafts, constructed of enormous trunks of trees and loaded with lumber and fire wood, were floating down the current. They were out in the forests of Siberia and when they were hauled on the shore they failed not to find ready purchasers.

Menshikoff followed with his eyes the different rafts as they were borne past him by the waters ; he seemed riveted to the spot and preoccupied by some absorbing thought apparently associated with the scene before him. When he moved on, he heeded not his children's efforts to engage him in conversation, but continued immersed in his own reflections.

Having reached a small plot of ground in the centre of the village, he stopped and said in an animated manner :

“ On this very spot, I intend to erect a house to God, the sovereign master. My soul yearns for the sacred calm of a temple where I may regain that peace to which I

have long been a stranger. For years, I labored to accumulate fleeting riches and attain a vain glory; why should I not employ the remainder of my life in elevating to my merciful God a monument, as a feeble expression of my veneration and love? The great Emperor who was my first master himself handled the hatchet for months to aid in constructing a perishable abode for man. How then, could I, a poor exile, hesitate to make use of the hammer and saw in order to raise for my companions in misfortune a church, where by the blessing of God they may obtain that peace of soul which is so necessary to them in their misery? My life, hitherto, has been a succession of acts condemned by Heaven. May my last act, at least, be blessed by the Most High!"

Menshikoff's children hailed the proposition with joy. They hoped that with such an object in view and with constant interesting occupation, he would gradually become more cheerful and take his part in the family conversations.

He commenced immediately the execu-

tion of his plan. The very next day he purchased the wood required for the building, having saved the amount from the pension allowed him by the Emperor. Provided with a leathern apron and taking his box of tools, he went daily accompanied by his two sons to his work. He seemed to have regained all his former energy; he labored without relaxation, taking no repose during the day and scarcely allowing himself a few hours of sleep at night. His daughters, in the mean time, were embroidering vestments and preparing articles for the decoration of the altar and church.

This sudden transition from a life of total inactivity to one of assiduous toil was not beneficial to him. His strength soon diminished evidently. In vain his children implored him to moderate his ardor; he pushed forward the work with increased activity, as though he feared he would die before realizing his idea.

When the winter set in, he was forced to discontinue his labors, as he had not on hand a sufficient quantity of wood to complete the edifice. Deprived of his occupa-

tion, he fell again into the same melancholy state, rarely speaking to his children and then only of God and eternity.

The second summer saw the completion of the church. Then Menshikoff said gently but seriously to Michaelow :

“ My son, amid the grains of sand I have met in my journey through life, you are the only grain of gold. I appreciate the immense sacrifice you have made for me, a sacrifice of which I was wholly unworthy. My children and myself would be basely ungrateful, if by retaining you longer with us, we were to become obstacles to your advancement in life, and prevent you from securing the happiness to which you can so justly aspire. Therefore, leave this miserable place where a hard fate compels us to remain. I shall be eternally grateful for your affection and fidelity. You have accustomed my children to work and to endure privations of every kind. Taught by your example, they have now the courage to be resigned to their sad destiny and to accommodate themselves to it. Your presence here is not so absolutely necessary to

us now, as it was on our first arrival. You have a mother and a sister whom you love. Your first duty is to them. Go then and consecrate yourself to those who have so holy a claim upon you, and enjoy in their society the sweet recompense infallibly given by a pure conscience."

Michaelow attempted to make objections, recalling the promise by which he had pledged himself never to leave the prince.

But Menshikoff was unyielding.

"I am not willing," he said, "to have you longer share my miserable fate. It is enough that my own children should bear the penalty of their father's faults."

He persisted in his determination, speaking in so decided and serious a manner, that at last, Michaelow was obliged to appear to accede to his wishes. He, however, requested permission to remain at Berezov until he could write to his mother and receive her answer. This was granted without difficulty.

The deep regret with which Menshikoff's children contemplated the approaching departure of one whom they had long

loved as a brother, may be easily imagined. Every day the prince would ask Michaelow if he had heard from his mother. At the end of four weeks the young man replied to the usual question that she had written. But he said this with a trembling voice, and tearful eyes. From that time Menshikoff urged him to hasten his departure.

Michaelow sorrowfully collected his scanty stock of wearing apparel, made a small parcel of it and went to take leave of the prince, who said to him :

“Go, my son. Take advantage of the fine summer weather to perform your journey, and may God grant you a happy return to your own home !”

“Father !” replied Michaelow, in a voice tremulous from emotion, falling on his knees before the prince, “give me your blessing ; I am your son and Matinka’s.”

Menshikoff was astounded by the announcement. He remained a moment immovable as a statue, still holding uplifted the hand he had raised to bless his child. He scanned with evident anxiety the features of Florent, as though seeking in them

the confirmation of the words just addressed to him.

"What!" he, at last, stammered, "can it be—"

"Yes, I am Florent, your son and Matinka's. As you force me to leave you, at least let me depart with your benediction; that will be my only inheritance and the most precious legacy I could receive from you."

"Your only inheritance!" he exclaimed, with bitterness. "You are right, my poor son. Miserable that I am! Your father is an unnatural being." And he sank back exhausted.

"Father," resumed Florent, with inexpressible anguish, "have you not an affectionate word for your son? Will you not embrace me that I may once feel your heart beat against mine?"

"May I dare press in my arms the son to whom I have caused so much suffering? I, who am unworthy to possess so excellent a child!"

He opened his trembling arms, and Florent cast himself into them; long did they

thus remain, mingling their tears and sobs whilst the other children wept in silence.

Suddenly he exclaimed: "And where are Matinka and Helen? Remembrances of the past rush upon me; it comes to me like a dream that I saw them at Tobolsk."

"Yes, father, you did see them there," replied Florent.

"Why did they not make themselves known?" resumed the prince, vehemently. "How could they allow me to depart to my exile without one word of consolation? And yet, my God," he continued, sadly, "thou knowest, I did not deserve to receive from them that act of charity. Yet one kind word would have been a balm to my bleeding heart."

"Father," said Florent, "gladly would my mother and sister have accompanied you here, have shared your fate and striven to mitigate your sufferings. In remaining silent, they did violence to their feelings, but not knowing your disposition in their regard, they feared to discover themselves to you."

"They were right; I had been cruel and

unkind to them, although I never forgot them or you. You were ever present to my mind, even amid the grandeur of the imperial court; how much more you have occupied my thoughts in my present solitude. I now recall your mother's voice when she said to me at Tobolsk: 'Matinka has pardoned you.' Alas! blinded as I was, I did not recognize her when she spoke, and Heaven denies me the happiness of embracing this noble woman and my beloved Helen."

"Father, this happiness is in store for you, if you desire it. My mother and sister are at no great distance. Say but the word, and they will obey the summons."

Menshikoff sprang to his feet. "Tell me, tell me," he exclaimed, with feverish impatience, "where they are. Let me go to them, and implore pardon on my knees."

Trembling with emotion, he approached the door. But Florent passed out before him, and a moment after entered with his mother and Helen.

Who could depict the scene so touching, so moving, when the husband and wife so

long separated were reunited? Menshikoff gazed in anxious uncertainty upon Matinka, but when she opened her arms, he exclaimed in a transport of joy :

“ Yes, dearest Matinka, you have pardoned me ! Oh, my God ! thou hast restored to me, so unworthy of Thy mercy, the angel whom Thou gavest me, and whom in my blind folly I rejected ! ”

The children of Matinka and the princess embraced each other with all the warm affection of brothers and sisters who had been long separated.

When their emotion had, in a measure, subsided, Menshikoff accompanied Matinka to the church. They went alone, desiring no witness as they offered their fervent thanksgiving for the blessing of their reunion. They were not to be again separated upon earth ; but Menshikoff's health and strength, impaired by previous suffering, failed still more rapidly under the influence of the feelings excited by his inexpressible happiness. One desire alone animated him—that was the completion of the simple church he had labored to erect.

This wish was gratified before the end of the summer. A priest was appointed to celebrate the Divine Mysteries, and no sooner had the last sound of the hammer died on the ear than the bell summoned the inhabitants of Berezov to the consecration of the little temple. The faithful hastened eagerly to be present at the august ceremony. Wax candles burned upon the altar, and shed a soft light upon the shrine of our Lady and upon the richly embroidered hangings, the work of the daughters of Menshikoff. As soon as the ceremony of the consecration was concluded, all present arranged themselves in two rows, between which Menshikoff, Matinka and their children advanced towards the altar. The priest blessed anew a union which had been broken years before by pride and ambition.

The energy of the prince was, however, completely broken down, and he became daily more feeble. His soul, on the other hand, seemed to strengthen in proportion to the decay of his vital powers. He was restored to happiness, he was reconciled to the God whom he had offended, to the

woman whom he had repudiated, and to his own conscience. . Happy in the midst of his family, he was still more happy in the hope of the blissful eternity to which a merciful Saviour permitted him to aspire. His time was divided between exercises of piety and his family. His previous life had been one of fierce struggle for earthly aggrandizement ; its close was to be in peace and serenity. He viewed with perfect tranquillity and resignation the approach of death. He conversed calmly with his wife and children of their temporary separation, and encouraged them to bear the trial by the hope of a reunion in heaven. He expired peacefully November 2, 1729.

The exiled family were in the deepest affliction, and their dreary home was rendered still more desolate by the loss they had sustained ; but on the approach of spring they suddenly received the news of the death of the young Emperor, Peter II. He had been carried off by an attack of small-pox, and Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, had ascended the throne of Russia. One of the first acts of her reign was to pardon

the unfortunate Menshikoff, and to reinstate him in all his former possessions. But he no longer needed the favor of earthly sovereigns; the Lord of Lords had already admitted him, we may piously hope, to His eternal kingdom. Nevertheless, the favor of the Empress restored to his exiled children their high rank in the world and their wealth. The children of Matinka remained in their obscurity. Happily, misfortune had taught the daughters and son of the princess a lesson of wisdom and kindness.

“Brother,” said Prince Alexander to Florent, embracing him tenderly, “what is mine is yours. Let us ever be, to each other devoted brothers.”

He, with the princesses, spoke in a similar manner to Matinka and Helen, and they were faithful to their promises.

All returned to St. Petersburg, where they were soon joined by Simonow, and during the remainder of their lives they were united by the closest bonds of affection. The marriage of the princesses to two great lords of the court, and the elevation of the prince to the highest dignities of the

empire, did not break the tie established by a common misfortune and a reciprocal fidelity. Matinka and her children were happy in their humble sphere, as they had no aspirations to rise above it. They accepted from the munificent offers of the young prince only what was requisite to enable them to live comfortably and simply. When Alexander and his sisters visited Matinka, they would often say: "We are rich, but you are richer in having no desires beyond what you possess."

Menshikoff's tomb is still seen in the northern part of Siberia. Far from him lies his second wife, and still farther, in the neighborhood of Moscow, Matinka and her children await the great day of the Lord, which will reunite them in a happy eternity.

THE END.





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